

A surgical mask is constructed from various newspaper clippings related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The visible headlines include "virus spread", "positive", "deaths", "Virus feared", "Cruise ship", "state of emergency for COVID-19", "Coronavirus", "Crisis", "worldwide", "outbreak", "cases", "diagnosed", "positive for virus", "outbreak", "dead", "nomic", "hotline open", "testing labs loom", "Virus worries", "viral", "scams", "Cruise ship", "state of emergency for COVID-19", "Coronavirus", "Crisis", "worldwide", "outbreak", "cases", "diagnosed", "positive for virus", "outbreak", "dead", "nomic", "hotline open", "testing labs loom", "Virus worries", "viral", "scams". A red banner with the word "JOURNALISM" in white capital letters is superimposed over the mask. Below the banner, the text "in the time of" is written in a smaller white font, followed by the word "CRISIS" in large, bold, white capital letters. The entire graphic is set against a dark, textured background.

CONFERENCE TRANSCRIPTS

OCTOBER 22 & 23, 2020

An event hosted by the
School of Journalism and Communication
Carleton University



JOURNALISM IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

OPENING ADDRESS

Allan Thompson, Associate Director, School of Journalism and Communication/
Journalism Program Head, Carleton University

Brenda O'Neill, Dean, Faculty of Public Affairs, Carleton University

Allan Thompson: Welcome to Journalism in the Time of Crisis, a two-day symposium hosted by Carleton University School of Journalism and Communication to examine the intersection between journalism and the pandemic. My name is Allan Thompson and I'm the head of Carleton's journalism program and the chair of this symposium.

Before I go into the details about the agenda for this event, I have two important matters to attend to. First, from my office here at Carleton University, overlooking the beautiful Rideau River, I'd like to acknowledge that this university and my home in Ottawa, Canada, are situated on the unceded and unsundered territory of the Algonquin Nation. I'd also like to invite Dr. Brenda O'Neill, the Dean of Carleton University's Faculty of Public Affairs to say a few words of welcome.

Brenda O'Neill: Thank you Allan. Good morning everybody and welcome. It's my pleasure to be here this morning to welcome you. I know there are 900 of you registered for this event, which is terrific, and I wish to welcome you, even if it's virtually, to Carleton University and the Faculty of Public Affairs.

Carleton Faculty of Public Affairs is actually unique in Canada. There's no other faculty that brings together a dozen academic departments, schools and institutes that are focused on examining issues that are essential to the public affairs of this country. Our graduates go on to work as journalists, policy analysts, economists, international aid workers, social workers, lawyers. And that list can go on. Each of the strong and distinctive units in the faculty have a clear commitment to public action and discourse. The School of Journalism and Communication, which is marking its 75th anniversary, is almost as old as Carleton University itself and has earned a distinguished reputation internationally. It's only appropriate then that Carleton's journalism school is organizing and hosting this important and timely gathering at the intersection of journalism and COVID-19.

I'm relatively new to Carleton, with less than a month as Dean under my belt, but one of my key priorities is to increase the recognition of the faculty's strengths and reputation. The mission of the Faculty of Public Affairs, to produce research to build better societies and stronger democracy, to foster informed citizenship, to address regional and global challenges, and to enhance and inform public discussion, has never been more important than it is right now during this extraordinary period in history. And that mission is exemplified by this very event. So even though we can't meet in person on campus at this particular time, we continue to come together and connect in innovative ways. And one of the ways to do that is through online events such as this one. So on behalf of the Faculty of Public Affairs and Carleton University, I want to welcome you to this remarkable symposium and wish you well over the next two days. I hope it is two days filled with fruitful discussion and debate. And in the months ahead, I wish you good health. Please enjoy your symposium.

Allan Thompson: Thanks very much Dean O'Neill.

As I said at the outset, Journalism in the Time of Crisis is a two-day symposium hosted by Carleton University's journalism school to explore the intersection between journalism and the COVID-19 pandemic. Carleton's journalism school, the oldest in Canada, was founded in October of 1945 in the wake of the World War II. In the shadow of another global crisis, we're hosting this international online

forum to look for lessons in the role journalism has played during the pandemic. We chose this topic and this conference to kick off a year of 75th anniversary events. Journalism, as an industry and a profession, was already experiencing a profound crisis when the COVID-19 pandemic plunged the world into a state of deep uncertainty. And yet people around the globe have turned to journalists to help them make sense of the most significant social and economic crisis of our generation.

Over the course of two days, through six keynote speakers and no less than 17 panels involving dozens of experts from around the world, this symposium will explore the nexus of journalism and the COVID-19 crisis to assess both the short- and long-term impacts. I'd like to note that a group of 14 Carleton journalism students comprise a multimedia news team that will cover this event from gavel to gavel, producing a podcast, managing our social media presence on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, and by posting stories to a medium.com newsroom site. After the fact, we'll package all of the panels and keynotes in YouTube videos that will be made available to all. We'll also produce a publication to document this event and our discussions.

Together, we'll examine such issues as the role journalists have played during the pandemic, the impact of the crisis on journalism practice and business models, the future of local news, the ongoing contest between journalism and misinformation, the under-reporting of the racialized impact of COVID-19, threats to global media freedom, media ethics, the impact in the Global South and the implications for journalism education.

This pandemic has forced journalists and news organizations to confront a host of unprecedented challenges in terms of news gathering, storytelling, ethics, workplace management, financial stability, distributing their product and much more. News professionals are adapting to the new reality of a world in full-blown crisis. But what will it mean for the future of journalism? Will it ever be the same or are we seeing shades of the new normal? All of this continues to unfold in an era of economic, technological and political disruption in the news industry. The old business models supporting journalism had all but collapsed in the years between the global financial crisis of 2008 and the global health crisis of 2020. Rapid technological change presented many promising opportunities for journalism, but also upended traditional revenue streams and news-gathering norms, creating a wide range of impacts, most notably massive job cuts and news business closures throughout the industry worldwide.

This event is called *Journalism in the Time of Crisis*, a riff perhaps on the classic Gabriel García Márquez novel *Love in the Time of Cholera*, but we also made a conscious decision not to include the word pandemic in the title. We hope that the lessons learned during this time will have applications in the post-pandemic period and we very much look forward to the post-pandemic period. So our mission here is to see what we can learn about the role of journalism during an unprecedented crisis, and look for ways to apply those lessons in the future.

From the outset, in the planning process, we decided to hold this event online. That's a good thing. We opted for a new platform called Socio to integrate the multiple zoom calls required to stage close to 25 mini events within a two-day conference. I'm pleased to report, as the Dean said at the outset, more than 900 people from

around the world have registered for this event. I thank each and every one of you and I thank especially the keynote speakers, moderators and panellists, close to 90 of them who have taken time to join us online today and tomorrow.

Now I'm very much aware that we're asking you to put in even more screen time in an era of growing Zoom fatigue. I call it repetitive zoom injury. So we're going to try something different to keep participants engaged during two full days of online events. At various points, we'll have mindfulness, meditation and drumming breaks with Val Shah, a DRÖM practitioner. Val uses a combination of drumming — drumming with your hands on your desk, and mindfulness to energize, relieve stress, and foster calm and clarity. She calls it DRÖM, a combination of drumming and meditation to energize and relieve stress. I invite you to give it a try.

I should end so that we can begin. Right after this opening, we'll hear from Ed Yong, a remarkable journalist for *The Atlantic* who started writing about this pandemic before it even began. My money is on Ed winning a Pulitzer for his COVID coverage.

Let me finish by thanking those who helped to make this happen. Carleton University is the host of this event through the School of Journalism and Communication. We're supported by a generous grant from SSHRC, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, as well as financial contributions from CIGI, the Centre for International Governance Innovation in Waterloo, ON, the American Press Institute in Washington, DC, and CPAC, the Cable Public Affairs Channel. Carleton has also partnered for this event with the Canadian Association of Journalists and the Center for International Media Assistance.

I'd like to thank my colleagues here at Carleton who are also working on this project. Aneurin Bosley, Randy Boswell, Sarah Everts, Brett Popplewell, Scott Mitchell, our research assistant Rachel Morgan, and the video editing team of Dave Elliott and Randy Bowler. And in particular, I'd like to thank Anne Blayney from CIGI for all of her work and MJ student Hannah Rivkin who has built a phenomenal student multimedia team.

Let me again welcome you to Journalism in the Time of Crisis.



JOURNALISM IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

PRACTITIONER KEYNOTE

Ed Yong, *The Atlantic*

Sarah Everts, CTV Chair in Digital Science Journalism, Carleton University

- Sarah Everts:** Hello and welcome. My name is Sarah Everts, and I'm the CTV Chair in Digital Science Journalism at Carleton University. Before we get going, I want to take a moment to acknowledge that this office, this university, Carleton University, is located on the traditional and the unceded territory of the Algonquin Nation. I'm joined here digitally by Ed Yong, a staff writer at *The Atlantic* and a long-time science journalist who has written some of the most breathtaking and insightful pieces that we've seen on the COVID pandemic. It's a delight to have you here. Welcome Ed.
- Ed Yong:** Hi, thanks for having me.
- Sarah Everts:** Back in 2018, which feels like a lifetime ago, you wrote a deeply researched piece for *The Atlantic* about pandemic preparedness or lack thereof, that predicted with alarming accuracy, many of the challenges and the missteps that we've seen in the response to the novel coronavirus, tell me how that story came to be?
- Ed Yong:** My editor-in-chief Jeff and I had been talking about pandemic-related ideas for a while. This was an area that both of us were really interested in. And it seemed to me that I had heard a lot about the concept of preparedness and the importance of it. But I didn't really have a handle on what it actually meant. It seemed quite an abstract, nebulous concept. And I wanted to put it in quite concrete terms with people, such as who are the types of people who are involved? What does it mean to be prepared?
- We wanted to look at things like supply chains and hospitals, and vaccine manufacturing capacities and so on. And I also wanted to ground that piece within the psychological challenges. Why is it that as a society, as a species, we do so badly at being prepared for these problems. So, it was actually really important to me that that piece came out at a time when there was no pandemic currently circulating around the world. In 2018, there was an Ebola epidemic in the Democratic Republic of Congo.
- The epidemic started just after I left. This is a reminder that these threats are always present. But nothing was battering down the door of the United States at the time. And I think that's really important, because that's actually the time when you need to really shore up your defences, need to invest in all the things that actually come to play in a crisis. As we've seen this year, the lack of those investments and preparations have cost us dearly.
- Sarah Everts:** I think for many in North America, mid-March was that moment of reckoning, where we realized that this novel coronavirus wasn't just happening in China and overseas, it was happening right here, as many regions went into lockdown and schools closed. Tell me about your moment of reckoning? That place in time, where you suddenly realized, "Oh, my gosh, this thing that I wrote about in 2018 is playing out right now."
- Ed Yong:** I think it was more of a creeping, dawning realization over the early part of the year. In January and February, my mind was not fully on the virus. I was on book leave, focusing on one big project, which had my full attention. I knew that the pandemic was brewing. I could see it changing from something that was just affecting China to something that was slowly spreading around the world, something that was making more of an impact in the United States.

At first, it was difficult weighing the responsibility of the big project I was working on and its deadline versus this other topic that I reported on before and was also dear to my heart. And full credit to the many reporters who were on this right from the start; people were hauling a bunch of words from week one. My colleagues, Robertson Mayer and Alex, were almost magically, on the testing process right from the beginning.

It got to a point in mid-March when it was clear that the crisis was going to be of great enough scope that it was going to be one of the defining stories of our generation. *The Atlantic* needed all hands on deck. I couldn't *not* be on the story anymore. So, I was asked to come back from book leave and gradually jumped into the fray, but you know, it's very rough watching what that you've written about and desperately hoped would never come to pass, but had wanted to warn people about, was now actually coming to pass.

Sarah Everts:

I can only imagine. Speaking of predictions, back in 2018, you wrote, "At some point a new virus will emerge to test Trump's mettle. What happens then? He has no background in science or health and has surrounded himself with little such expertise." And Trump has ultimately mismanaged the pandemic in a myriad of ways it can feel a little overwhelming. From your bird's-eye view, from your perspective, what do you see as his most egregious weaknesses or failures with the pandemic?

Ed Yong:

There is an abundance of riches to choose from. However, a few things spring readily to mind. First and most crucially, his utter abdication of responsibility. Trump is not a leader by any definition. He is very lazy, he shies away from true challenges. And despite the fact that a pandemic is clearly a crisis that requires national federal-level coordination, Trump has just not been able to provide that. The plans that have been rolled out have been so vague as to be completely useless.

Trump's posture has been largely to leave things up to governors, to other people. That lack of coordination which only the federal government can really achieve, has left the United States with this problem that it is difficult to try and resolve as 50 independent entities, and probably many more than that, rather than a single coherent force. I think that has been very costly. The other thing that I think we need to talk about is the president's repeated sowing of misinformation. In a crisis like this, we need someone who can provide clear, calm, authoritative, evidence-based communications, and we have had exactly the opposite of all of those things from the president on an almost daily basis. He has downplayed the severity of the virus, even when he knew that it was going to be serious.

Trump has silenced and muzzled the mighty CDC, he has trumpeted, wonder drugs like hydroxychloroquine, he has wondered out loud about the curative potential of injecting bleach into bodies. I could go on in the big cover story I wrote for *The Atlantic*. There's a 212-word sentence about Trump's many, many misgivings. The crucial thing to recognize here is that there are no dark arts involved in predicting how Trump would act in a crisis like this. So I did just that in 2018 and in 2016. I wrote a piece about how a pandemic would play out under a Trump administration after he won the election, but before he was even inaugurated, which laid out much of what he actually has done. And, it didn't take a lot of skill to do that.

Trump has always shown us who he is. His many failings were entirely obvious on the campaign trail, when he was a citizen during the reaction to the Ebola epidemic in West Africa. It was all transparent, and in many ways, Trump is America's microcosm in that respect. The vulnerabilities and the weaknesses were predictable and foreseeable beforehand.

Sarah Everts: True. One of the issues that I worry most about is his politicization of the COVID-19 vaccine. By making false promises about its arrival, and using it or trying to use it as a lever for re-election. What's your take on this? what are the long-term consequences of his politicization of COVID-19 vaccines?

Ed Yong: I think it's hard to say when we are still a few weeks into the election, but I would be very shocked if there was a surprise vaccine announcement in that timeframe. Partly because I think there has been some pushback from the actual scientific bodies involved. Even the Scientific Director of Operation Warp Speed has been clear about how the data just won't be there in time for a vaccine or announcement pre-election. We may well be surprised, but regardless, I think that you're right that the use of a vaccine as a sort of political cudgel, whether one arrives or not, whether approval happens or not, is damaging. It increases distrust. And vaccines are an area where distrust is already a problem. We didn't need more distrust in vaccines.

Some of the misgivings that people have had, I think are entirely reasonable. For example, if you had an announcement in the next couple of weeks, I would be skeptical about the merits of that. And I believe it worsens a lot of the problems that we've seen this year, which are all part and parcel of a growing distrust of empiricism, of evidence, of institutions, of leaders. This isn't just about vaccines, it's about things like masks, it's about social distancing, every part of the US pandemic response has been corrupted and warped in this way.

I think one of my concerns is that obviously the election is an important milestone in time. If Trump should win a second term, I think we're in for a lot of trouble. But even if he doesn't, he's still a public figure, and he's still going to be out there, talking to his supporters, spreading misinformation. We have the potential to change things on November third, but it's not going to be a light switch. I think that is really important to recognize in general with the pandemic — there are no light switches. There's nothing that will just flip us back to normal — a vaccine won't do that either. And it is subject to many of the same errors of intuition that I've written about, that have trapped us in these dangerous loops of thinking for the pandemic this entire year.

Those areas of intuition are exacerbated by Trump, but they are not entirely dependent on him. So it's sort of up to us, science journalists and citizens to try and resist these errors for the near and medium-term future.

Sarah Everts: Just to pick up on that, many people see the vaccine as this potential turning point, as a panacea for getting back to normal. What's your reality check on that? If a vaccine is approved with due process in the next few months, what are your concerns? Are we going to get back to normal right away?

Ed Yong: Absolutely not, I think it's going to take a long time for even an effective vaccine that is approved through the stringent regulatory process to actually help to turn the tide. If it does at all, there are questions about how effective it is going to be. One could

be licensed that will be 51 percent effective. That is going to help, but it's not going to immediately return us to 2019. That vaccine would have to be transported across the country, distributed fairly, widely, equitably. Is that going to happen? I have some doubts, given how well the United States has risen to the challenges, how it has handled logistical challenges throughout the year. We're in a similar situation where we don't have enough personal protective equipment for many health-care workers.

We've never done anything like this before. There is infrastructure of course for rolling out and using childhood vaccines. But in this case, you're talking about vaccinating a large proportion of the population, a lot of elderly people who might not mount a sufficient immune response. There are issues with having to manufacture entirely new types of vaccines that haven't been used and mass produced before. There are questions obviously about trust and communication.

So there are all these complications. I think a vaccine is part of the endgame, but I also think people haven't fully grappled with how long we'll continue to need the other stuff that we've been relying on: masks, testing, basic public health, social distancing and so on, even when a vaccine is approved. The vaccine is really only the beginning of the end. It's not the end.

Sarah Everts: Thanks for that reality check.

Ed Yong: Sorry.

Sarah Everts: Yeah, I know.

Ed Yong: It is a horrible position being a science writer this year. You're really stuck in a constant state of telling people it's bad. Some bits could be good, but the good bits are probably less good than you think they're going to be.

Sarah Everts: Let's move on from that theme. Let's talk a about the biology of the coronavirus that you write about with such eloquence. You've referred to COVID-19 as a starter pandemic. What do you mean by that?

Ed Yong: I think there is a sense that because this virus has brought so much upheaval upon the world that it must be singularly bad, and that the extreme nature of the pandemic must reflect some extreme quality of the virus itself. You see that in general discourse, you even see that in the scientific literature. I think there's a sense that this is a weird virus that is doing all sorts of things we've never seen before, where in fact I think a lot of what we have seen, such as the COVID effects on many different organs, these long-term effects that I've written about, there are people who are experiencing long haul symptoms. These are unusual aspects of the disease, along with a few cases of reinfections, this reflects some "weirdness" of the virus.

I actually believe that a lot of this is simply due to the fact that it's a pandemic, and there are millions of cases. And so outliers become more common, the variety of effects we see is wider. And it's hard to work out how much of those strange phenomena are due to the virus itself, and how much is just due to the fact that the virus is very widespread. I don't think that this is anywhere near the worst-case scenario that we could have been hit with.

In some ways that is both galling and terrifying, and in some ways, it's kind of a blessing. It depends how you look at it. There are other pathogens that are more transmissible, more contagious. There are others that have a much higher fatality rate. If COVID had swung to the extreme in either of those directions, I think we would be in much worse shape. And there is one counter argument against this, which is, as I've described it, an anti-Goldilocks virus — it's just bad enough in every way.

Some people would argue that if it was worse, in terms of for example fatality rate, it would be more obvious to watch it spread and people would have freaked out more and taken it more seriously right at the start. Or, if it had for example, rather than disproportionately affecting the elderly, disproportionately been killing children, then people would really have panicked more and done more to control it at the beginning.

I don't know if those arguments are true or not. There is, I think, some merit in the idea that the virus was just contagious enough, just sneaky enough, to just get past us, and then just bad enough to cause a lot of harm, but still leaving the door open to some of the misinformation that's been circulating. I don't think we would be having these ridiculous herd immunity debates that this virus is killing 50 percent of people infected, right?

But that being said, it could be worse. And I think that's one thing that we need to internalize for the future. This is not the worst it could have been, the fact that the world, and the United States in particular, has done such a bad job of controlling it really should be a wake-up call and a reason for quite radical introspection and humility.

Sarah Everts:

Yes, I agree 100 percent. As someone who follows the coronavirus's science and there's new articles out on a daily basis, what has struck you from a bird's-eye view as being some of the most surprising or nefarious aspects of the virus? What has struck you as being most interesting about it in a macabre kind of way?

Ed Yong:

I think in terms of the basic biology, the issue of asymptomatic spread has been absolutely crucial, and the issue of its overdispersion. Super spreading events are very important, wherein a lot of people who are infected seem to infect almost no one and then some people in fact infect a great many people. Both of these phenomenon, to me, are extremely crucial to understanding the spread of the virus to help when considering some of the control measures that are important. I think compared to the discourse in March 2020, we would certainly want to upgrade the use of masks, the importance of good ventilation, being outdoors, and maybe downplay the importance of things such as surface cleaning. Hand washing obviously is still important in infection control, but I don't think it's going to be the make or break for this particular disease.

I think messages about people in prolonged proximity, in poorly ventilated spaces without the protection of masks, these are so important. What else is important? I've mentioned this already, but I am still really fascinated by the long-term consequences of infections. I believe there is this group of people, long haulers, who have not had symptoms bad enough to send them to hospital, but certainly serious enough to debilitate them for months on end, which has severely compromised their quality of life and their health. A lot of these people still can't even get recognition of their problems, let alone medical attention or answers.

I think it's fascinating the way they have found a community for themselves, advocated for themselves, formed ties with people from other chronic illness communities such as ME and dysautonomia, who have dealt with these problems for a long time. I think there is a sense in which COVID, because of its severity and the attention being paid to it, can shine the light on these other aspects of viral illnesses that were not unknown, but have been dismissed, perhaps wrongly so.

I also wrote recently about some effects of COVID on the heart. There's been a lot of worry that this virus might increase the risk of viral myocarditis, inflammation of the heart. The thing is, a lot of viruses cause myocarditis, including really familiar ones. We don't pay attention to it and we don't know what proportion of those cases progressed to heart attacks and heart failure versus resolving on their own, because people aren't looking at people's hearts when they were just getting normal respiratory viruses. And now they are. There's a large amount of panic, which is not great. But there's also this chance to actually understand a lot of basic aspects of biology that we didn't have a handle on before.

Sarah Everts:

That is very interesting. Let's talk a little bit about the news media's coverage of the pandemic and how they've managed to do. In a matter of weeks, health reporting went from a niche beat to the purview of literally every general assignment reporter across the world. Suddenly, sports journalists are writing about cytokine storms. From your perspective, how has the news media as a whole done in covering public health during the pandemic? How have they done getting up to speed?

Ed Yong:

It's really hard to generalize. I see both positives and negatives. And I think I have a slightly different take on this from my science journalist colleagues. There's a sense from the field, like our field, that reporters with specialist knowledge would do the best job with this and that. Much of the poorest reporting comes from people from different beats that have sort of hopped into this without any previous background, or without that specialist knowledge, I definitely see some of that.

I would note that a lot of people who work in science and health reporting were not science and health specialists in the first place. They learned those skills on the beat. And I see reporters among my colleagues, who are not science and health reporters in traditional ways, but who have latched on to this story with tremendous skill. For instance, Alexis Madrigal and Robinson Meyer have been among the top reporters on the testing story, and they were respectively tech and climate reporters before this. My colleague Amanda Maher has done amazing work and she is a house reporter, but she's defined her own health beat. She's not an infectious disease reporter. Derek Thompson is an economics writer and has done a fantastic job.

I think there are many people who aren't science and health reporters who have switched to this topic and done incredible work. I think there's two reasons for this. We often, as a field, overweight the importance of specialists, subject matter expertise, and underweight the importance of craft. I think a lot of people with really excellent journalistic skills have been able to pivot very effectively, because they know how to do things such as synthesize a large amount of knowledge very quickly, how to limit the bounds of their own knowledge and stretch it appropriately through interviews, and how to contact a lot of people and find out information from the right sources.

I think those skills have been really important. That being said, a lot of health and science reporters really have led the way in terms of coverage. I've already talked about Helen Branswell, who I'm sure needs no introduction to this audience. There are so many others — Roxanne Kennedy has been amazing, Maggie Koerth, Julia Bellows, I'm forgetting so many others. But there are people who have really risen to the challenge.

There's also a lot of bad reporting out there. I'm sad to say this and it's hard for me, as someone who tries very hard to find and promote people I know are good, to get a sense of the proportions of those who are not doing a good job. I know that I got into journalism in the first place not because there's some aspiration to join this noble profession, but because I was first a scientist, and then a science information officer at a cancer charity who was woefully annoyed at the quality of reporting on the topics that I was covering. I've come into this from a kind of antagonistic side route and I've been delighted at just how much quality reporting there is.

But there's also a lot of weak stuff being written. I think our tendency to treat the published paper as the atomic unit of science journalism, does poorly in this crisis. I'm not saying people should never write up single papers, but I think that the choice to do so is harder now than under normal circumstances. There's so much information out there and people are drowning in it. Just covering every bit, every little bite-sized package of information as it comes out, can just add to that feeling of being overwhelmed, rather than helping people actually make sense of what is happening.

And I think a lot of the work that I and other colleagues of mine at *The Atlantic* have been trying to do, has been to try and synthesize. To try and do big sweeping pieces that look across at large amounts of information. And also that doesn't treat this just as a science problem. It's not just a science story, and I think we're wrong to treat it as such. It's a sociology story, it's an anthropology story, it's a politics and culture story. Every beat has a role to play in this. And every beat also has to deal with every other beat.

I might have an advantage as a science reporter, but I have no sociology training, no politics training, and I needed to jump into those fields. And I'm not seeing reporters in those fields saying, "Who is this interloper coming in without any sort of politics background or sociology background?" It's interesting to me that, a lot of that rhetoric is coming from us, rather than from all the other people whose beats are also actually very relevant to the pandemic.

Sarah Everts: That's a point well made. Speaking of craft, which you brought up, I know a lot of journalists are humbled that you managed to step out of the thick of COVID news to get a big picture and then write these eloquent kind of bird's-eye-view assessments of what's going on, all while still posting on social media and keeping up with *The New York Times* crossword puzzle. Everybody has their own strategy for writing and reporting, what is yours?

Ed Yong: First, it's been very hard. If you told me at the start of this that my reaction as a journalist to this pandemic was going to be to write, at this point, 14 5,000-word features in a row, I would probably have told you that was a very unlikely and a terrible idea. I think a lot of that comes from *The Atlantic* and my editor. When I

came back from book leave, I thought I was just going to do normal news stories. And I was told right from the start, “What we want you to do, is to take the biggest possible swing, and to really go big and to do something that is analytic and that synthesizes, and that gives that big sweeping view, while still maintaining the rigour of just normal day-to-day reporting.” And that’s what I’ve tried to do.

So definitely I was mandated to do that and given the space and time to do it. I wasn’t told, “We want one piece a day on the pandemic, and also one big feature every two weeks.” It was, “We will give you the space to do the big features. If you need to step away for two weeks to do that, do it.” It turns out two weeks is not a ton of time.

Okay, so a few things on the craft. One crucial thing has been just finding the right people and finding the right people across a bunch of different disciplines. Not just epidemiologists and virologists, but also the other areas I’ve talked about. Sociologists and medical anthropologists have been amazing. Scholars who study disability have been my MVPs throughout this. There are so many different areas with folks who have really, changed, shaped and improved my understanding of the broader context of the pandemic which has been really important.

A lot of the skills that I’ve accumulated just doing normal reporting, like normal daily paper-of-the-day science reporting has been really useful here. Being able to work quickly, interview efficiently, all of those things come into play. I’m a massive structure nerd, so I outline and structure things very, very intensely before I even start writing. And that has been incredibly useful in this situation.

I’m just trying my best to stay on top of all of it and it’s really hard; doing all of that work, plus looking at the kinds of conversations that people are having on social media, finding the right sources, constantly trying to find new sources. Almost every piece I’ve written, at least half of the people I’ve talked to, I’ve talked to for the first time. So I’m continuously trying to find new people to expand the perspectives that I’m getting.

And again, I’m going to go back and give more credit to my colleagues. I think *The Atlantic* has built a very, very generative collegial atmosphere. We have a very active Slack, we have people discussing what the right angles are and what the right things are coming up are. Plus, we’re constantly trying to stay ahead of the game, trying to anticipate the stories that are going to be big, perhaps two weeks down the line or a couple of months down the line, what are the public service angles that we can give to people.

The very first piece I wrote when I came back from book leave that went huge was “How the Pandemic Will End.” I think that was the right piece at the right time, that so many people were just starting to grapple with the reality of the pandemic and didn’t know what was going to happen. Laying out the near and far future made that piece really land. And since then, I’ve tried to write pieces that I hope not only sort of do double duty by giving people a sense of where we are but also where we might go in the future and what are the things that we need to think about. Pieces like the pandemic’s spiral piece ask: what are the areas of intuition that have trapped us so far? How are they going to play in the future?

For me it's not just saying, "Here's what is happening," but also saying, "Here is how to think about what is happening." I think it's that extra layer of analysis that *The Atlantic* very specifically tries to shoot for and cultivates the idea that we help people to work out how to think about the news, rather than just giving them the news. This is a core part of what we're doing, and I think informs a lot of the coverage that I and others have done in the pandemic.

Sarah Everts:

Really interesting. Another question in the craft vein is, as many journalists have been writing or trying to do big picture pieces, they've relied on military analogies. They've relied on battle metaphors, silver bullets, winners, losers. And you've been really cautionary about this sort of framing. Can you tell me a little bit more about why that is?

Ed Yong:

Absolutely. First, I will raise my hand and say that I've absolutely done this myself. I've talked about fighting. I've talked about all of us have written about frontline workers, using that military terminology, which insidiously creeps into the way we talk about this situation. And there are some good reasons for that. There is a degree to which this is a fight. There is, I think, in terms of large, massive crises that consume societies for a protracted period of time, this idea that it is much more like a war in that sense than it is say, like a hurricane or a natural disaster that is geographically isolated and temporarily protracted.

I understand the gravitational pull of the war metaphor. I wrote a piece on immunology where I compared T cells to grizzled mercenaries in a bar. But my rule, even in that case, was, "You get one more metaphor, and it better be a good one." But the reason I think it's problematic is that these metaphors of fighting, of disease and sickness, has been about fighting an enemy, battling against cancer, that kind of language, is insidious for several reasons.

First, it wrongly equates strength, whether you're talking about physical strength, musculature or mental strength and optimism, with health and recovery. And we know it's much more complicated for sure. If you have good health beforehand, you have a lower risk of dying from COVID. But very fit, young, healthy people have fallen sick, and many of the long haulers are athletes or people in the prime of their health. Your mental state can affect your health. But again, it's not like people can simply will away their sickness, and often their mental state reflects some kind of prior advantage. So, it's much easier to not have chronic stress if you've lived a life that doesn't foist chronic stress upon you.

That is one reason. The other reason is that, if you unite strength and fighting with health and recovery, then you automatically create a link between sickness and death, and weakness and failure. You're saying people who died are weak and are losers. And you're not only saying that they are weak in terms of physical weakness, but because we use the same language of strength and fighting and combat to talk about our physical traits, mental traits, moral traits, temperamental traits and geopolitical power. With all of these things, the meanings bleed from one metaphor to another. If you're talking about people losing a battle against disease, you're equating their death with physical weakness. You're also therefore equating that with moral weakness, mental weakness and all those other kinds of weaknesses.

There's a history of actively conflating those things. I wrote a piece about why strength metaphors are a problem. A lot of the anthropologists I talked to, again, so valuable. They talked about this movement called Muscular Christianity, which started in the nineteenth century in Britain, moved to the United States, deliberately conflated these ideas of exercise of rugged fitness with moral strength and superiority. This ties into the creation of the YMCA, it ties into Theodore Roosevelt trying to overcome his childhood asthma and creating this very "tough guy" cowboy exterior. But then, at its core, this movement is a misogynist movement. It's a reaction to what was perceived as the soft feminization of church and everyday life.

Then, as it grows, it starts dragging in imperialist ideas. It starts dragging in white supremacist and eugenicist ideas. And obviously, it has at its core a ton of ableism. You're saying that people who have disabilities are morally inferior. All of these pieces tie into our modern day use of strength and battle metaphors. And you cannot escape the fact that there is an inherent sexism and racism and ableism to all of these things, which obviously manifests when someone like Donald Trump starts talking about his good genes and his ability to beat the virus.

When Trump talks about strength, he's not just talking about the areas that we talked about. What he's really referring to are two things. One is the projection of strength, and this is a very masculinized toxic version of strength, where it's really all about aggression and volume rather than the actual physical or mental strength. And he's talking about privilege. He's talking about the fact that he has access to three drugs, including some experimental cocktail that most people have never even been near, he gets airlifted to the hospital, he gets the best possible medical care.

This is a very long answer to your question, but it's tricky. I think all of this should make us be very wary about the metaphors and the language we use, and all the historical contexts of those phrases and usages. If anyone should be cognizant of and very watchful of the context of the word, it's surely ours. It's surely journalists who live by our words.

Sarah Everts: Thanks, for those deeply considered thoughts on the subject.

Ed Yong: I've been thinking about this a lot recently.

Sarah Everts: Another thing that journalists are struggling to parse or to figure out, and I know that a lot of newsrooms have had conversations of this ilk, they've been grappling with how to balance their role in reporting public health directives, like almost PSA. With their fundamental journalistic responsibility to hold people in power, including public health officials, accountable. That's a balance. How do you juggle? How do you balance that? How should we be balancing that?

Ed Yong: It's hard I think for a number of reasons. I think you're right that we are not doing public health announcements, we're not doing PSA. But we kind of are, certainly in some of the more like public service e-pieces that *The Atlantic* has published. We've written pieces about what do you do about ordering takeout? Or, visiting family in the south, and our readers want to know the answers to these things. And sure, you can report on them and you can contact a bunch of different experts and do the basis of the job, but at the end of the day the line between that and doing this as a PSA is very thin.

I think the way in which it still is important is that we're not like a mouthpiece for the CDC for example. If there is disagreement, it is our job to talk about that. There were disagreements about masks in the early days, about aerosol transmission. The piece I wrote about how COVID affects the heart was really interesting in that there was actually quite a lot of controversy from scientists about what this means exactly. I think it is our job to talk about these controversies, without necessarily lashing ourselves to one side or another. That being said, we know from hard experience in our field that there are areas where forced balance is a problem. We know from covering vaccines, from covering climate change and evolution, and all the rest, that there is this problem of all these means of examining the controversy, both sides, all of those issues come into play here.

We can write pieces about the herd immunity debate as an example, but I think it's important to recognize that the balance here is actually heavily weighted on one side. It's not like everyone is saying the same thing, but it's not like there are two camps of people who are equal in number who are both making very strong points. So we have to be very, very cautious about our ability to gauge the strength of evidence, the degree of consensus all of these things.

This balance is also difficult because a lot of us have been at this for months now and it's very draining. There aren't many science journalists; there aren't that many public health people. And given the intensity of the job and the protracted nature of the crisis, a lot of us are relying on the same people again and again for our sources. And it's hard not to find an affinity with people who have basically been in the trenches — there we go with another war metaphor — for months. But we still have to create a certain amount of tension there. Our sources are not our mate, and we have to be cognizant of all the sub-dynamics at work on the academic side of things.

I think that is a difficult balance to strike: when there are people who you're grateful for their time, you know they're struggling personally and you basically agree with them. You're grateful for the help that they're giving you and sharing their expertise. Despite all of that, I think one still has to maintain a certain amount of distance.

Sarah Everts:

Absolutely. And as you mentioned before, there's been an obscene amount of misinformation with this pandemic. What do you see as the balance, the "sweet spot" for newsrooms as they decide on, "Should we focus on writing or producing pieces that debunk misinformation? Or should we be focusing on the firehose of COVID-19?" I mean, do you see a sweet spot? Do you think it's worth mainstream media focusing on debunking, perhaps full time?

Ed Yong:

I do see a sweet spot. I'm not saying that everyone should do this, but I'll tell you how I'm thinking about the problem. I think that the problem is not only that there is a lot of misinformation, but that misinformation by virtue of the platforms that we distribute our news to, travels further and faster than accurate information. We've all seen this, right? We know how fast lies and conspiracies can cascade through Twitter for example. We know that the algorithms that govern those platforms are geared towards extreme viewpoints, rather than things that are actually true. And we know that if we try and debunk something, it takes time to do that. And the debunking never goes as far as the lie that it is meant to address, which is very demoralizing. How do you deal with that?

My strategy is to try and always play a future offense while playing any kind of defence. So rather than just say, "You might have heard this thing, it is wrong. Let me explain." I'm also trying to say, "I'm trying to arm people with the knowledge they need, for a sense of similar categories of wrong things in the future." Think of it almost like a vaccine. It's not therapeutic, it's a vaccine. It's a sort of mentor, conceptual vaccine that helps people make sense of what is to come. For example, I wrote this piece about a very widely shared story about a supposed a new strain of the coronavirus that was much more transmissible than previous ones. It went super, super viral, based on I believe, just a press release.

I wrote a piece about strains that talked about that story. But that also dealt with what actually is a strain and how do we know when something is a new strain or not? What kinds of evidence do the people I'm quoting as being skeptical need to have to accept that there is another strain? How long will it take to gather that evidence and how will we know when we have it. So it's not just, "This thing you heard is wrong." It's also saying, "You will probably hear many things of similar kinds of wrongness in the coming months, and here is how to think about those things."

Again, it's this idea of not just giving people the news, but helping people to think about the news. And not just helping them to think about the news in the moment, but think about the news in the future. A lot of the work that I've tried to do, is writing pieces about how the pandemic will end, this pandemic spiral that we're trapped in. An earlier piece about why the pandemic is so confusing, is all about these ideas. Trying to give people a solid conceptual basis for interpreting this massive swirl of information, that is constantly coming and being added to.

Sarah Everts:

Absolutely. And in terms of the media moving forward, I'd just like to wrap up with a couple of questions. In terms of your advice to mainstream media at large, what are some of the things moving forward that they should focus on as the second wave hits or the first wave continues, as the case may be? What words of advice would you have? What were the stories that were missed on the first wave that people should be focusing on? What were the mistakes made by the media? Do you have any thoughts or advice moving forward?

Ed Yong:

Those are really good questions. It's the type of question that I think I'm going to come up with a great answer to sometime tonight, after we've stopped this call. I don't know. I'm a little hesitant to answer this because I'm aware that I have not seen 100 percent of what is out there. And I don't want to say, "Oh, we missed this story," only for some reporter to very rightly say, "Actually, I covered it." I think that happens a lot. And I don't want to do that. I think what I will say is that I'm not saying that the approach that we've taken or that by doing these big sweeping pieces, has been the only route that people should pursue. But I do think that there is a reason why they have resonated with our readers so much.

They have consistently done really well. I think they have provided a valuable public service. And I think that one of the things that I hope the pandemic makes us do as a field, is to think hard and re-evaluate our values as journalists. What are we actually trying to do here? What are our instincts, and do they serve us well and our readers well at a time like this?

Does the tendency to look at something like this and find every possible angle and do 100 different stories, is that the right way forward? Or do you just want five stories that really hit hard and hit home with people? I don't know the answer to that. I'm not saying that the second thing is the right one. But I think that we slip into this very kind of reflexive mode when events such as this happen, where we want to produce as much and as fast as possible. It's the nature of news coverage. And I don't know if that actually leads to greater public understanding.

I certainly don't think it does, when we aren't actually taking the time to do the basics of the job — basic due diligence. And by that I mean things like, if you're writing about it, okay, fine. If you want to write about a new study, go ahead. But for God's sake, get outside comments. As if there is no time to do so. There is no need for coverage that is a 400-word write up of a paper with only the lead scientists quoted, or a press release or anything like that. It just doesn't help.

We should be trying to double down on the best practices of our field. What we can truly hope to achieve when we're doing the most rigorous, the most ethical, the most impactful possible journalism. And I recognize that there is a certain amount of privilege in saying this from an institution like *The Atlantic*, which has given me the space to do that, and that not every reporter has the space to do that. I guess I'm not saying this just to reporters themselves, I'm also saying it to editors, to publishers, to the entire industry.

The Atlantic has proven this year that high quality, deep, long pieces can find their audience. We have had record numbers of subscribers, absolutely ridiculous numbers of subscribers this year, and often directly on the back of work that is free. Most of our pandemic pieces, almost all of my pandemic pieces are outside of the paywall. And I have personally accounted for thousands of people subscribing to our magazine. And that is astonishing, because that's not people going, "I need to read this, I guess I'll subscribe." That is people going, "I have read this and can read all of this for free, but I am impressed enough and find enough value out of it to give you money." And I think that is such an important lesson. That if we double down on quality, and if we give writers the space to do their best work, readers notice.

Sarah Everts: What a place to wrap up. I think that's great advice. And I really do appreciate your time today. Thank you so much for joining us Ed and stay safe, stay well.

Ed Yong: You too. Thank you so much for having me and giving me this opportunity. Stay safe to everyone here, keep doing it, we need it. I hope you're all okay.



JOURNALISM IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

RESEARCH

KEYNOTE BY RICHARD FLETCHER

Richard Fletcher, Senior Research Fellow, Reuter's Institute
for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford

Allan Thompson, Associate Director, School of Journalism and Communication/
Journalism Program Head, Carleton University

Allan Thompson: Good morning everyone welcome to our first research keynotes of our two-day symposium Journalism in the Time of Crisis. My name is Allan Thompson. I am the program head of the journalism program at Carleton University in Ottawa. Our guest for this research keynote is Richard Fletcher, who's going to speak to us in just a moment. Richard is a senior research fellow and leads the research team at the Reuter's Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford.

He's primarily interested in global trends and digital news consumption, comparative media research, the use of social media by journalists and news organizations, and more broadly the relationship between technology and journalism. Today he'll review the highlights of a major Reuter's study navigating the infodemic and also update us with some more current research. For the infodemic study, researchers used survey data to document and understand how people in six countries, Argentina, Germany, South Korea, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States, accessed news about COVID-19 in the early stages of the pandemic. How they rated the trustworthiness of the different sources and platforms they rely on and how much misinformation they said they had encountered.

So all this to say Richard's research covers much of the territory we hope to examine in the next two days, and we're very privileged to have him with us. I'll be your moderator but for most of the next 25 minutes or so I'm going to turn the floor over to Richard to take us through his research. So Richard over to you.

Richard Fletcher: Thank you very much and thank you for the kind introduction. It's a pleasure to speak to you all today from here in Oxford. I'm going to talk about journalism during coronavirus but I'm going to do it in quite a specific way. I'm going to talk about it through data on these audiences which, is really one of the main ways we try to study journalism here at the Reuters Institute at Oxford. Of course, this is only one way in which we can understand journalism during the coronavirus crisis. But I think it's a particularly important one. Because journalism and news really does exist within the context of its audience and I just say this is one of my key starting points when we're thinking about something like this here at the Institute.

I think it was very clear from the beginning of the coronavirus crisis, not only was this a public health crisis but it was also a communications emergency. Simply because communication is absolutely essential to how we respond as societies. And I think the WHO sort of understood this quite early on when they said, "We're not just fighting an epidemic, we're fighting an infodemic," back in mid-February. I think the epidemic term really speaks to some of the issues around misinformation, which of course are very important.

I think part of how we think about communication during coronavirus is also about how people access good reliable information, whether they can actually do that. And I think this is the main focus of some of our research into coronavirus. In order to really understand that, I think we have to come back to some quite basic questions about the media and its audience, such as how do people get the news about coronavirus? If they get it do they trust it and how much do people know? Does that trust translate into knowledge and does that inform the way they behave? These are not new questions, but I think they're particularly important during a situation like coronavirus.

And these are the questions we've tried to answer with some of our recent research at the Reuter's Institute. As I already mentioned, we have two main projects that looked at coronavirus. The first, which we published as a report called *Navigating the Infodemic*, was based on a survey in six countries, the United Kingdom, the United States, Spain, Germany, Korea and Argentina. This research was conducted near the beginning of the coronavirus crisis in many countries. In many cases just as they were entering lockdown in early April 2020. My co-authors Rasmus Nielson, Scott Brennan, Nic Newman and Philip Howard published this later that month, with support from the Oxford Martin School in conjunction with the Oxford Internet Institute.

This was a study of six countries, and so we also followed this up with the UK COVID-19 news and information project, which was based on a series of 10 surveys in the United Kingdom with the same people running from mid-April to mid-August. Obviously, this offers a different perspective on the coronavirus from the navigating the infodemic study. It's narrower because it focuses on only one country, the United Kingdom, but it has more depth. I think these two can be combined to help us understand what's happening more broadly. I'll refer to data from both during this talk. But I think it is important before going any further that even though this is a six-country study and a one-country study, this will not necessarily be representative of the situation globally or in every country.

The crisis is clearly playing out very differently in very different parts of the world. And countries, as we know, have very different media systems, have different relationships with media and politics, and different roles that the media plays are within those societies. It's very important to point that out, I think. At the same time, I still think there are some key takeaways that hopefully will be applicable in other countries across the world. So let's start by thinking about COVID-19 news access, really one of the most basic questions we can ask about the role of news and journalism during the crisis. We started by thinking about this in the infodemic study by looking at all the different sources and their reach for coronavirus news information in the six countries that we studied.

We asked people whether they received coronavirus news and information from news organizations, from governments, from health organizations, scientists, ordinary people and various other potential sources of information. What was clear from this at first was that no one source can reach the whole of the population on its own. Even for those who are getting news and information about the coronavirus it will often be a combination of different sources. Having said that, it's also clear that news organizations are the most widely used way, or at least they were at the beginning of April, the most widely used way of getting new information about coronavirus in these six countries. Around three-quarters as the crisis peaked in some of these countries, said that they used news organizations as a source of news and information about coronavirus in the last week, ahead of governments, health organizations, experts, ordinary people, and it's also clear that even when some of these outlets and other organizations do reach audiences it's almost certainly in part due to news coverage and the fact that they've been featured in news about coronavirus.

That was back in April and in some cases as we see from other studies and we can see from our study in the United Kingdom, this seems to have been the point at

which news use really peaked. This isn't surprising of course. There was new and important information that almost everyone needed to know at that point. But this chart shows the proportion of people that said they accessed coronavirus news at least once a day on average over time. And we can clearly see a decline from mid-April through to mid-August. In the United Kingdom a decline from seven percent to nine percent to 57 percent. And we can think about this in a slightly different way. This chart shows the proportion of most written news stories from the BBC, *The Guardian* and *The Mail* that were about coronavirus. And you can see in April through to roughly June, almost 100 percent of the most-written news stories were about coronavirus.

From June onwards this started to fall quite quickly to around half of the most written news stories. If you remember, this was a time when the world of news stories such as the Black Lives Matter protests in the United States for example, and the coronavirus slightly slipped down on the news agenda at least in the United Kingdom. And some of the reasons for this are of course due to supply as I just mentioned, but it also has to do with the changing nature of the crisis. Also, there is some evidence that people at this point started to actively avoid news about coronavirus. As we saw a slight rise from April through to roughly June, those who said they actively avoided the news rose from 15 percent to 25 percent, and almost all of this as we found out in a follow-up question is about avoiding news to do with coronavirus, this was in the United Kingdom.

Why do people actually avoid the news about coronavirus? Well, we asked another follow-up question and by far the clearest reason either people gave or the stand-out reason was that people felt that it was having a bad effect on their mood. About a third said that they felt like there was simply too much news at that point. About a third said that it was because they didn't feel that they could trust the news. And just under a third said that they didn't feel like there was any point because they couldn't do anything with the information. I think it's interesting to note how news avoidance grew quite quickly during the early parts of the crisis in the United Kingdom and then didn't go back to normal levels over the summer, even when they showed the crisis began to change.

I think it is still striking in general that a small but significant minority even during coronavirus didn't think that the news was meeting their needs. Regardless of the reasons for why people might have turned away from the news during this point, a key point is that different groups started to turn away from the news and at different speeds. So this is something that we wrote into the reports that we published several months ago, which is available on my website, which focused on coronavirus news inequalities in the United Kingdom. As we can see the chart on the left shows the gap between news use between under 55s and over 55s. So again, this is the proportion of people from each group who said they accessed coronavirus news at least once a day on average, and as you can see over time, the gap between the over 55s and the under 55s actually grew.

As some were smaller back in April, by August were slightly larger and this we think represents a growing inequality by age when it comes to coronavirus news. The chart on the right is the same but for education. So here we compare the group with a university degree with the group without the university degree. And

we can see that although the size of the gap between these two groups didn't grow over time, it still exists, and it was present at the start of April through to the end of August. And this of course still matters during a crisis like coronavirus. These gaps, I think it's fair to say, represent longstanding inequalities when it comes to news use, for example, between young and old men and women, rich and poor, and so on. But I think that's the strategy, sort of relief during a situation like coronavirus, which often requires a collective response from all parts of society in order to deal with it effectively.

So these gaps really matter. But another way to think about it, which I think is also particularly interesting, is the fact that in some cases, these gaps are actually smaller at the beginning of the crisis. And I think that this shows that these are not laws of nature, these are not things that are set in stone. And if the message is important enough and is conveyed in the right way, then we can do something about these gaps. Access to news is of course just one part of this much larger, much more complicated issue. And I think it's important to realize the extent of which people will actually respond to information in the news or act on it in some way depends on their attitudes towards it, and of course key attitudes that we've got, the centre of which is trust. How much do people trust news information about coronavirus? I think trust is always important, but it is particularly important during a situation like coronavirus because the information often implies some kind of response or requires some kind of response.

People need to be able to feel confident they should act on it. I think the first thing that we can say about trust more generally is that many countries entered the coronavirus crisis with relatively low levels of trust in the news. This data is from our digital news report project, which is an ongoing annual survey of news audiences in 40 different countries. And what we saw from that when we collected data in late January, early February of this year, was that around 38 percent of people across all those countries said that they trust most news most of the time. And although it's not always clear what we should compare this to, I think it fair to say that's quite a large figure. Perhaps more importantly, figures have been declining since we first started measuring this in 2015. And the chart on the right shows that decline in some countries. It's not declining in all countries, but in many of the countries, particularly those which previously enjoy high levels of trust in the news.

We have seen a decline, and this was the situation we faced as we entered the coronavirus crisis in 2020. What's perhaps the most interesting is that this wasn't really reflected in the early parts of the coronavirus. For instance, this is some data we collected as part of the navigating the infodemic study. What it shows is that trusting news about coronavirus as measured at the beginning of April was much higher than our measure of trust in most news most of the time from the digital news report. You can see in some cases such as the United Kingdom, Korea, Argentina and the United States, trust was almost twice as widespread in news about coronavirus than it was about the news in general. Now these measures are quite different, so we should be a bit cautious in making a direct comparison between them, but I don't think the sort of slight differences in the way the question was worded and the slight differences in the nature of the question can really be on the road to explaining such large differences.

I think it's really more likely to do with something about the serious nature of the topic and the fact that in some countries, the coverage in particular in the United Kingdom for example, was quite cautious at this last stage and strongly timed to official restaging. I think this is something that this republic recognized and changed their actions in this way. What's interesting, and this is shown on the chart on the right, is that it seemed to mirror an affect that we saw in some countries called "rally around the flag" where approval for national leaders seemed to uptake at the moment in which the crisis was becoming more acute. And we turned this to "rally around the news," because we thought we were seeing something similar to do with trust. When it comes to trusting news, I think one final point worth keeping in mind is that although trusting in coronavirus news was higher perhaps than we were expecting, still lower than trust in news and information from for example scientists, health organizations, and so on. But higher than we were expecting.

At the same time people also seemed to reflect quite positively I think on how the media had helped them during the early stage of the crisis. So around 60 percent across the six countries that we surveyed said the news may have helped them understand the pandemic so far. And around 60 percent thought that the media had explained what they should do in response to the pandemic. It wasn't entirely positive around 30 percent across all six countries, that said that they thought the media had maybe exaggerated the crisis even at this early stage, but again, not the same issue as trust, but still quite positive evaluations for the media at this stage.

Like the rally around the flag affect, enjoyed by some national leaders, in the United Kingdom at least it seems that trust in coronavirus news and information from news organizations began to wane quite quickly. Trust in news organizations for news about coronavirus fell from 57 percent mid-April to around 45 percent by June, where more stayed through until August. I think the key point here is that trust is not an inherent good. Trust could be a sign of healthy skepticism and I think most people would welcome that when it comes to news coverage. But I think at the same time it's important to recognize that for some this is not just healthy skepticism, it's hardened criticism in some cases. So not only does around one-quarter to one-third of the UK population think that news organizations are a concerning source of false and misleading information about coronavirus, but perhaps more shockingly, around 35 percent in August thought that the news media had actually made the coronavirus worse.

Now I think that this is something that's very particular to the United Kingdom, in a country where it has been very severely affected by coronavirus. There are many people who have had serious questions about the official response. But it's still striking nonetheless in a country like the United Kingdom that so many people could hold this view. Perhaps this translates into how much people know about coronavirus and then perhaps how they behave in response to it. In our initial Navigating the Infodemic study in April, we decided to ask people some basic questions about coronavirus to see how much they knew. We adapted the questions from the WHO's own mythbusters website, which aimed to take some common misconceptions about coronavirus and correct them. These were fairly easy to adapt into simple true or false questions. You can see the questions that we asked on the slide.

Perhaps encouragingly, most people in all countries got most of the questions correct. So, 86 percent got three or more right in the United Kingdom. Slightly lower figures elsewhere, but still, most people get most of these questions correct. At this stage of the crisis, it's important to point out that hard facts were quite difficult to come by compared to many other things we might want to ask people about. It's kind of difficult put some of this into context. But I think these are things that ultimately what the WHO thought that people might not know. And it was encouraging that so many people seemed to do quite well on this measure. As we go to the infodemic reports, those who rely on news organizations for information about coronavirus tended to score slightly better than the average, and we didn't find any evidence that those who rely on social media in particular, were scoring any worse.

Again, we followed this up in the United Kingdom. Here we found similarly high scores. The questions were different, we used multiple choice instead of true/false, and we had a mixture of questions about what people need to do to stay safe based on official advice from the NHS or the government and mixed those with questions about current affairs. You can see two examples here. We asked respondents if they could identify the country in Europe that had the least strict lockdown, Sweden. And the second question we asked people, how long the NHS advised them to wash their hands for. This was a kind of well-known piece of advice to the people in the United Kingdom. I thought they'd recognize it, and it might be different to elsewhere. But this is how it was communicated.

And again, we saw that most people in the United Kingdom answered most of these questions correctly and this added to our beliefs that the public, compared to something like politics, people are regularly asked in survey about political facts to measure their political knowledge and we're used to seeing quite low scores in matters like this. This was slightly unusual in that people tended to score very well. Of course, it depends on the questions, but I think this is quite the average. I think it's possible that some of this knowledge, and this is something that we're going to work to test in future research, had fed into an increased awareness or willingness about coronavirus flaws. And again, this is data from the United Kingdom. We asked people how often they observed each of these five pieces of advice, which are official government information in the United Kingdom and available on its website and strongly communicated through the news media.

We asked people how often do they stick to it? Now it's very important to hear that these are self-reports and they shouldn't be sort of seen as an exact precise measure of what people actually do. We know that self-reports and actual behaviour can differ in some cases. But again, I think it is a sign of people's awareness and their actual willingness if you like, to observe the rules. And we saw that although the numbers did go down slightly over time around 60 percent in the beginning of June said that they washed their hands regularly, stayed two meters apart, take the option of working from home, limiting contact with other people, and staying home as much as possible. With this, numbers fell to a range 50 percent by mid-August, with the exception of hand washing, which seems to stay at a fairly constant level.

You see a similar picture when we asked about preventative steps or the willingness to take preventative steps to help combat coronavirus. We asked people whether they would be willing, for example, to take a test if offered, to take a vaccine, and to

self isolate. And again, we see quite a high willingness to do this in theory. There is some hesitation as you can see from the bar at the bottom, about downloading and using a coronavirus tracing app. This is something we've seen in other research. I think it perhaps slightly reflects some of the danger of not taking what you've seen from the United Kingdom. So, that is the slight exception. But on the whole, generally a high willingness to take preventative measures. Again, you need to be cautious because there's other data emerging now. But even as people report a high willingness to do some of those things, when they're faced with a situation of having to self isolate for example, the practicalities of life can get in the way. And although people might not stick to it 100 percent of the time, they might be generally willing to do so.

It's important again to preach that these are not measures of actual behaviour; it's more theoretical willingness to behave in a certain way. But again, I think it presents a reasonably positive picture. Now I'd like to start to wrap up by thinking about how we can summarize all of this and what it means as we move into the second wave of the crisis. At least in many countries, in Europe, that's the stage at which we're at now. Together with Rasmus Nielsen, Antonis Kalogeropoulos gave some information on to my colleagues in the United Kingdom the coronavirus news information project. I think we can start to work towards identifying some of the key challenges, but also before we do that, perhaps some of the positive points that I've already emphasized.

First as we've seen with some exceptions of course, most of the UK public do seem to be informed about coronavirus. They've mostly shared a willingness to follow government guidelines and also to take precautionary measures. Yet at the same time, there's a key challenge around how we deal with information equality around coronavirus news. Remember the gaps we saw between young and old, between educated and lower-level forms of education. And then finally, how can we think about the parts of the public who have currently not been served or whose information needs to not currently being met? Think for example if those people have used news very infrequently or perhaps had very lower levels of trust or perhaps both. What can we do then? And I think this is perhaps something we can discuss and I think there are already some options available. Although it may be challenging to reach some of these groups, we should consider these are different platforms that are perhaps more popular among low news users or the young.

Also think about the role that some large popular news outlets and up-and-coming ones can play. Even if they are perhaps not necessarily seen as the same, their level or sort of reporting and quality if you like to surround this, they still have a very large reach. How can they be used in the crisis? And I think for the broader public, who again seemed to be mostly informed, open to suggestions and cautious, the issue here has more to do with trust and I think there's clearly no shortage of information. We saw early on in the crisis that people can access information and are willing to access information if they need to. Then the question might be more to do with trust rather than access. Then I think it may be important to think about some of the relatively uncontroversial sorts of news and information that we've also identified in our work such as scientists, doctors, nurses, health organizations and so on. How can they be used as a source of information as opposed to perhaps politicians and convicts?

I'll leave it there. Thank you very much for listening and I welcome any questions and discussion.

Allan Thompson: Thank you very much Richard. As I expected from the outset, you're pretty much taken us through the whole agenda for these two days so thanks for that. I just wanted to ask a question while I wait for questions to roll in. Why the choice of looking at audiences rather than the journalism? This is a basic choice about the way you do the research by gaging the audience rather than trying to access the journalism itself.

Richard Fletcher: I think that as I said in the beginning, this is just one way of looking at it. And I think it is a completely different way, but just this potentially revealing way to look at journalism. I think that when we started with the infodemics study it was said at that point that this was a new problem. There was a lack of information. What contribution could we make relatively quickly and provide robust and sort of evidence-based info to help those who needed to navigate this particular crisis? I think surveys, for all of their limitations do offer a way to get robust data quickly and we thought we could make a contribution. When it comes to thinking about journalism, I think you quickly get into issues about quality and assessing quality, informativeness and other dimensions if you look particularly at content, I think that is not very difficult. It's very time consuming to do well. I think these studies will come in time and they'll be very valuable when they do arrive.

We thought our time was best used with making a different kind of contribution at that point. I think there are of course other issues that others have done very interesting work on to do with the pressures placed on journalism during coronavirus and some issues of that nature. Which again, I think will take longer to do well and I'm glad to see that people are doing that. But I think this was something we felt we could do and make a contribution at the time.

Allan Thompson: Good. I'm going to the questions. I see one here from Joshua Beamans: Have you considered future research comparing attitudes and news consumption among people who have been affected by COVID-19, either personally or from a family member, comparing those affected with those not and what the news meant to them?

Richard Fletcher: Absolutely. I think this can be quite challenging. Not only do you have to sort of think about how you can do this and that, and then in a sort of appropriate and sensitive way. Even something like a survey. It's also more practical issues to do with that than the fact that any relatively small number of people have been fortunately severely affected by coronavirus. This is something we have measured in the UK study. Again, it's not the easiest thing to measure. We have tried to do it and I think this is something we want to bring out with further analysis because I didn't agree with Joshua when he identifies this as an initially important sort of factor thinking about things like trust or even news access.

Allan Thompson: My colleague who did an excellent interview with Ed Young from *The Atlantic* poses a question. She's noting that Ed said in his Q&A, the magazine has seen a rise in subscriptions over the COVID-19 pandemic. He suggests a rise in public trust in the magazine and he attributed that, at least in part, to their conscious editorial

strategy to do big picture, analysis pictures, the pieces to contextualize the crisis instead of this sort of firehouse of news stories. What do you think of the strategy of doing bigger picture pieces as a way to improve trust in the media?

Richard Fletcher: I think certainly for a certain section of the news-reading public or the news audience that is something that has a good chance of working. And I think it's a great example of how that can be done well. When it comes, I think this sort of trust in the subscriptions, and perhaps they are slightly sort of a different issue. I think that certain subscriptions that many publishers have reported, I think I can see the logic of how that could happen during a situation like coronavirus. I wonder, and I think it will be very interesting to see how that plays out the long term. And I think when it comes to trust, I think this is much more interesting as a long-term trend. I think for a certain part of the public that's very important and for the other part perhaps it will be less important. And perhaps I think going back to something I mentioned, this isn't the value of studying the sort of content that have been able to provide it for the audience data. I wonder whether we might see a difference in the type of news coverage that was seen particularly at the beginning of lockdown in certain countries and how that can perhaps be linked to trust because I think there is.

When we ask people about why they have low trust in the news for example, one of the most frequently mentioned was bias, which is kind of a catch-all term for a kind of general sort of grievance with the media and I wouldn't be surprised if people felt that the news coverage at that point was slightly different and that may, in some way, explain the level of trust.

Allan Thompson: You also talked about this challenge of clearly identifying in the early research the age gap in terms of trust and consumption of media and whether or not the contextual long pieces are going to address that gap. Or do we need journalism at both ends of the spectrum?

Richard Fletcher: Absolutely. I mean, I think that's the point. I think journalism is going to be highly valued from certain parts of the news audience. But it's just not realistic to expect everyone to particularly value that kind of journalism and I think the kind of journalism that is primarily about communicating important information to people who are perhaps not going to spend a long time reading a very informative piece. That's just as important of course and I think in a crisis like coronavirus it gains in importance.

Allan Thompson: I have a question from Nicole Lanshut at Ryerson. You mentioned theoretical willingness, were you following government regulations, is there also an element of theory regarding self-reporting of whether survey respondents have seen misinformation of COVID-19 that they are able to identify what may not be accurate.

Richard Fletcher: It's not something that we have really done a lot of research on. As I mentioned, I think our focus was looking at how people get what we generally think of as good reliable information. There have been studies on misinformation, particularly around coronavirus. I think there are some interesting findings starting to emerge and then we've already identified certain groups that are practical or prone to misinformation. Also, certain attitudes that seemed to correlate with this sort of higher likelihood of belief in misinformation. But again, it's still quite early stages. One of the interesting

findings from that researcher I think although we have good evidence to show that older people are more likely to share false information on social media it seems that, at least in the studies have, that younger people are actually more prone to believing misinformation about coronavirus. I think that highlights the difference between the sort of behaviours around sharing and belief. But also, it tallies with what we found in our research about which groups are consuming less information and which are the most practical and vulnerable to this information.

Allan Thompson: My colleague Chris Waddell here at Carleton who is on a panel on public trust asks, in your survey of multiple countries did you find significant differences between countries on any specific issues related to COVID-19? And do you have any thoughts why that may be the case? Why there were such differences across different countries?

Richard Fletcher: I think that we are used to seeing differences in trust across countries and in our 40-country survey that I mentioned, this is a figure for a proportion of people who trust most news most of the time ranges from about 55 percent in a country like Finland down to around 20 percent in countries such as Greece and Korea. But all the countries in that survey come with a certain level of scoring on the human development index for example. But even within this quite similar group we see huge variation on something like trust in the news. What was interesting is that their variation seemed much smaller when we asked about trusting coronavirus intermittently in six countries. But I would certainly expect to see a lot of variation, but we didn't ask in the survey about specific issues. But yes, it was in general terms about trust, and of course we didn't have any data on specific attitudes towards specific things about coronavirus.

Allan Thompson: I just wanted to ask you and I think I'm going to try to end every panel this way, what's the lesson? What's the lesson here going forward for journalists, from what's happened in this eight-month period?

Richard Fletcher: I mean I would partially go back to what I said toward the end. I think we had evidence, and this is much different in the United Kingdom, and again I want to stress that might not be true. I think the evidence is people are willing, and knowledgeable to respond in the right way to coronavirus. So, I don't think that's the challenge. I think that the challenge is around giving what we need to something we respond collectively to coronavirus. I think the challenge is how do we focus our attention not on the people who are always going to be well served by the news media. How do you focus on those who are being underserved at the moment? And I think here is the key role for relying on certain types of expertise as opposed to others. And also thinking about how, for example, for those who want to communicate information whether it's health organizations or governments or politicians, what's going to work best for this group of people and it may not be kind of prestige outlets that are used by the group that I believe are already well served.

Allan Thompson: Thank you very much, Richard. This has been great. Richard Fletcher from the Reuter's Institute for Study of Journalism at University of Oxford gave our research keynote



JOURNALISM IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

WATCHDOG VS. MEGAPHONE

PANEL

Moderator: Randy Boswell, Carleton University
Speakers: Obi Anyadike, *The New Humanitarian*; Aaron Derfel, *Montreal Gazette*;
Charelle Evelyn, *The Hill Times*; Evan Solomon, CTV

Randy Boswell:

Hello everyone. Welcome to the first panel discussion of the Journalism in the Time of Crisis conference. I'm very happy to welcome a glittering panel of discussionists for the next hour or so. What we're going to be talking about is framed as a conversation about the watchdog versus megaphone functions of journalists. In short, how have journalists balanced their responsibility to amplify public health directives, which would be the megaphone part of the equation, and their responsibility to challenge political leaders and public health officials? That would be the watchdog component of the job.

I'm joined today by four panelists who will help animate our discussion around this subject. First, we have Charelle Evelyn, who is the managing editor of *The Hill Times*. We also have Obi Anyadike of *The New Humanitarian*. Evan Solomon, who will be familiar to many here in Canada as the host of CTV political programs and radio talk shows, and Aaron Derfel, who is a health and medical reporter with *The Montreal Gazette*.

I'm going to go into a bit more detail to introduce each of these folks. Obi is an online journalist and editor, with extensive experience covering conflict, aid, and international development issues and crisis in Africa and the Global South. He's the senior Africa editor with *The New Humanitarian*. Most recently he closely scrutinized widespread warnings that Africa is on the verge of a historic famine as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

Evan Solomon is a Canadian columnist, political journalist, and radio and television host. He's the host of the daily national radio program that's broadcast on many stations across the country. He's a writer with *Maclean's* magazine, he's host of CTV's national political news programs, *Power Play* and *Question Period*. I doubt there is any significant figure over the course of the pandemic that he hasn't had an opportunity to interview on one of those platforms.

Aaron Derfel is an award-winning health-care reporter with the *Montreal Gazette*, specializing in investigative and narrative journalism in a 30-year career that has taken him across North America. He has reported extensively on the COVID-19 pandemic and produced a daily Twitter thread followed by tens of thousands of Canadians. A regular panelist on discussions about public health policy, he also teaches part time at Concordia University. Among his writings in recent months were reports that laid bare the unthinkable tragedy unfolding in a west island long-term care home, where a severely overstretched staff had largely abandoned residents of that facility, where nearly 40 people died.

Charelle Evelyn is the managing editor at the Ottawa-based *The Hill Times*. She's also been a national affairs panellist with CBC radio's flag ship current affairs program *The Current*. Previously, Charelle was an associate editor with the *Wire Report*, a reporter and online editor with *The Prince George Citizen* and a freelance journalist with *The Ottawa Citizen*. Charelle is also formerly the head of the Ottawa chapter of the Canadian Association of Journalists. This year she has been writing and directing coverage of the COVID-19 crisis at *The Hill Times*, which for those of you who aren't aware, it serves as a local news outlet for Parliament Hill and its community here in Ottawa. But of course, it has a national profile because of who happens to inhabit that community, namely the nation's political leaders.

Again, welcome to all of you. To begin, I'm just going to ask each of you to describe, if you could, how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected your own reporting efforts over the course of the year and your own jobs. Then lead by all means into your overview thoughts about the panel topic as well. Charelle, can we begin with you?

Charelle Evelyn:

So, as you mentioned at *The Hill Times*, we cover Parliament Hill and the parliamentary precinct, those few blocks in Ottawa that encompass where everything happens, like a small town, like a community newspaper so to speak. Back in March, on March 13th specifically, the House of Commons voted to adjourn for what was going to just be five weeks. Just to let things get under control, keep the MP's from being vectors of transmission for the virus.

When essentially your community shuts down, what do you do? And how do you then turn your attention to this massive national story when downtown Ottawa is a ghost town? Shortly thereafter, after the House of Commons shutdown, Ontario went into lockdown. So all the other businesses and services that were downtown were also closed. Our office, we didn't have to close because as a newspaper media outlet, we're an essential service. But when everybody's gone anyways you might as well work from home. You don't have committee meetings to rush off to down at the block.

So that happened, but at the same time you now had the Prime Minister giving a press conference and media availability outside of Rideau Cottage every single day. And you had to keep the Chief Public Health Officer Dr. Theresa Tam, and the Health Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister and all sorts of senior officials available every single day. And they were saying something. So what do you do? Do you just say, well they're there, so we might as well talk to them? Or write down what they're saying? No, because at *The Hill Times*, our mandate is always to not really cover the day-to-day goings on, like you might see on your typical nightly news that gives you a rundown. Here's what happened in politics today.

It's more of here's what they said and why it matters or what the inside story is behind that or behind the scenes or just giving the bigger picture from the get-go. So that's how we approached it to begin with. We went in and said, "Okay, what's the news? Why does it matter? And how are we going to hold people accountable for these massive decisions that they're making?" That's what we did, and we took this fire hose of information, we synthesized it, sometimes into certain things, such as timelines in the paper, sidebars, infographics. But those were just kind of there next to here's 1,200 words about what this all means and why people should care and how it's going to affect people's lives and policies and politics down the road.

At the end of the day, when people talk about public service journalism, accountability is public service journalism. So you can't hold somebody accountable simply by holding up that megaphone. You have to dig into what it is exactly that they're saying and move on from there. I don't want to prattle on, so I'll leave it there.

Randy Boswell:

We'll get back to you. Thank you very much for your opening thoughts and no doubt we'll circle back. I'm going to ask you too about the resources that you have available in your particular news organization to cover the pandemic and of course

all the other issues that are going on. We almost had an election yesterday. So thank you for that opening.

Aaron, you're next on my screen to speak up. Could you give us a quick overview?

Aaron Derfel:

It's a pleasure to be here. Actually quite an honour. This pandemic is challenging all journalists in ways we could never have imagined. And in my case that's certainly true. One of the things that I've started that I could never have foreseen and I basically stumbled into is my decision to write a daily Twitter thread of 10 to 20 tweets. Something that I post every night. This is in addition to my regular journalism.

Randy, you were mentioning that my story, a few stories actually that I've written about the pandemic in Montreal. What happened is that sometime in March, I wondered what could I do, how could I contribute as a reporter? This is about the unpredictable nature of the pandemic. It turned out that, at least in the first wave, Montreal had become the epicentre of the pandemic, not only in Quebec but across the country. And there were thousands of deaths, in fact, Quebec has reported more than 6,000 deaths to date. By far the greatest number of any of the provinces.

I found myself in this inferno if you will. And I realized that in order to stay on top of things, I feared that I was missing or I might miss the story. In fact, I still fear I'm missing the story. From almost a methodical point of view or mythological point of view rather, I felt that the only way to report on this pandemic accurately was to cover it every day, every single day, including on weekends and on vacation. And the way to do that is through my Twitter thread.

I couldn't have foreseen the response. Thousands of people have joined it — diplomats, politicians, ordinary people, epidemiologists. As a result of this thread, I've made contacts with a range of professionals, geneticists, epidemiologists. And I benefited from a form of crowd sourcing because there are hundreds of people who are following the thread and who keep me abreast of the latest developments in their neighbourhood and in the province.

What could I do that was different and I felt wasn't being done? There were reports, but nothing every day. And that's what I could do. I saw that there were these phenomenal journalists that you have participating in the conference, Helen Branswell and Ed Yong. Helen of Stat News was, I believe, one of the first journalists to sound the alarm about the pandemic very, very early on, I think in January. Ed Yong has done just tremendous work. What could I do? What could I bring to this?

What I could do is report on my neighbourhood. It turned out that my neighbourhood was the epicentre of the pandemic. It's as if in retrospect I've been on this work for 22 years. I feel that I have been in training for this moment inadvertently for all these years. I have been writing about hospital outbreaks and epidemics in the community, epidemics like gastro or sometimes the measles.

So, when the pandemic hit, I'm perhaps like some other journalists who aren't on the health beat; it was not so foreign or alien to me. I felt that what I could do is just cover my neighbourhood. And ironically, for me it's local journalism but this is a global issue. The themes that have arisen are universal. The mandate I've given

myself is to follow where the pandemic is moving geographically in the city. It became clear at one point it was moving into low-income areas with many racialized communities. That was interesting, this is something that we could not have necessarily foreseen.

Then what I started to do is read about what's going on in jurisdictions around the world. People were making all kinds of comparisons. I was drawn to the best practices and reading about the worst practices, reading about the response in the United States versus the response in South Korea. I would say in about the middle of the first wave in Quebec, the premiere of the province, Francois Legault, he was holding daily news conferences at 1:00 PM, and giving people an update on the situation.

What he did is he announced arbitrary dates, what appeared to me arbitrary dates, to reopen Quebec, even though the number of hospitalizations was going up and the number of cases and the outbreaks were occurring all over. That struck me as odd, so I wrote about that. In writing about that I pointed out that there's no other jurisdiction in the world that was using his criteria to reopen. The criterion he used was citing a so-called stabilization of deaths outside of the nursing homes. No other jurisdiction in the world, not even the White House, had cited criterion to reopen.

I recall that he pulled out a graphic to show this, a chart. So naturally I wrote about this and by writing and raising questions about this, you're challenging the politician. It soon became apparent that he didn't really like my courage. He was reading my stories; he acknowledged that he was reading my Twitter threads as well. But then he started to single me out for criticism. And I guess that dovetails with the theme of this panel discussion, which is the megaphone versus the watchdog role. I've had to balance the two as I've focused methodically every day on where the pandemic is moving in the province.

Randy Boswell: Thanks Aaron. I'm certainly going to follow up on the tit for tat discussions I guess you could say you've had with the premier over the months. It's been very interesting. Obi, can you give us a sense of your perspective on this.

Obi Anyadike: I'm with *The New Humanitarian*, which is a humanitarian newsletter. We try and look at both the aid response, or the response of the aid system, and how disaster and crisis affect people. In a sense, this is kind of when COVID hit. I'm based in Nairobi and I'm concerned with the African continent. We're kind of on globalization's periphery. It's sort of like a phony wall. Our first cases weren't until March and we could see this spreading in other regions. So, we were kind of waiting with bated breath for it to hit here.

And when it did, we had the same kind of run on toilet paper and everything else in the supermarkets. But for us, or for *The New Humanitarian*, the interest was: how does a multi-billion-dollar aid industry respond to something like this? I mean the impact on people was not immediate at all. And that's another conversation. The infection rates and death rates have remained relatively low on this continent. Which is interesting in terms of the dynamic of the coverage.

The idea of the aid industry is that it's meant to stay and protect. And yet they could potentially be vectors for COVID. Most of the international staff were based in Europe and America, where COVID had already hit. So it was kind of interesting in terms of

how they were having to adopt COVID protocols, which was having a distinct impact on beneficiaries they were meant to help.

The initial story was really about how this was impacting the aid industry rather than the people who are most vulnerable. I mean immediately there were coverage challenges for me. The inability to get out into the field was frustrating. Obviously you have a duty of care toward your freelancers, so that was also another challenge, to make sure everybody socially distanced as best as possible to keep safe. And obviously any risky travel was ruled out. So now how do we handle our regular reporting?

For me the key issue was to try and interrogate some of the perceptions that were formed and manufactured outside of the continent. Africa is not homogenized in anyway. Each country is very different. In most countries the infection rates were very low, the death rates were low as well, as I said. It was much more of an economic impact, what the lockdown was doing to local economies. And that was kind of an interesting dimension to report on.

Also looking at alternative ways of tackling this. African governments, again I'm making a huge generalization, but we're very quick to lockdown. Part of the reason was that health systems are quite fragile. So they imposed quite stringent measures, which seemed to have worked in slowing the spread of infection. But it's had a serious knock-on effect in terms of household incomes. To try and report on that, to try and look at alternatives to raise ideas around the pandemic on this continent being different in its impact and effect to that of other regions. To try and interrogate some of those issues was what I thought a valuable role to play. I'll end there.

Randy Boswell: Thank you for that introductory overview. Much appreciated. Evan Solomon, please weigh in.

Evan Solomon: Thanks Randy. And like Aaron, it's great to listen and to be a part of this. Aaron's stuff is unbelievable, just for the record, it is just some of the best reporting I think in Canada in the last year. It's been important, it's been a hallmark of great journalism. For me, I've loved your reporting. So I just wanted to say phenomenal. That's what it's all about. You take a situation and the particular is the universal. And of course I know Charelle and her great work and it will be nice to meet you.

Look, all of us know in any crisis there is this urge, whether it's a war or whether it's a health crisis, like a pandemic, there's this sense that you have to join up and unify against the common enemy. And journalists instantly get co-opted in this sense that you better join in this united front and you're in this kind of partnership with the common cause. And it's an incredibly dangerous moment for journalists who have to guard against that.

We see it in our Parliament, which I cover. My front step is the Parliament. Charelle and I do that. They try to substitute a crisis as if a crisis and the democratic check-and-balance systems and the role of the media and the opposition somehow are expendable in a crisis. Oh let's delay that. Let's suspend that because they'll say things such as, well everything's going so fast. There's money, we're in such an urgent situation.

And it's really at those moments where all of us have to kind of take a deep breath and just do the job. Accountability never goes away in a crisis, in a war, in a pandemic. Facts don't disappear. Oversight and transparency and the fundamental job that we do, in fact, becomes more important. I always say to my team that I work with, as events go faster, we've got to go slower. Don't get breathless. Just stop. What's the issue? What matters to people? What's the accountability question?

We are living in a time where politicians have weaponized distrust as a form of politicking. And they've used the media as if, especially in the United States, that the media is somehow the enemy of the people. Which is an old, kind of Ibsen idea that the state somehow can't sustain questioning. You're not doing your job, you're an enemy. Or you're not all in it.

This dichotomy of watchdog and megaphone in some ways is important, but in some ways it's a descriptive thing, you're always a watchdog. And being a watchdog is being a megaphone as well. You're being a megaphone to transparency. You're being a megaphone to accountability. You're being a megaphone, the job is, it's not oppositional for the sake of oppositional. It's accountable because that's our job. And increasingly on social media, it's a very unpopular thing. For me, I'm sure for everybody here, politicians attack you. People, every single day, I'm a mouthpiece of the Liberals and then I'm a mouthpiece of the Conservatives and then I'm a mouthpiece, it doesn't matter. Because unless you are, especially in this day and age, echoing exactly what someone says, you've somehow become bought by a partisan.

All of that is just signal to noise ratio. Our job is really to tell stories that affect people. To be fearlessly accountable. To just adhere to our principles more than ever as the winds are howling. I would just say finally, before I stop, in a pandemic, we're spending more money faster than we've ever done, more people are dying. If you look at what Aaron's done, you talk about the death rate in a place like Quebec. Those numbers and the thing about a crisis is abstraction is the enemy of journalism. And the friend of politicians. Statistics, abstraction, oversight, desensitization.

We say oh, 9,000 people have died, 10,000. Just do the math on what that means, how many Canadians are dying every single day. That means right now someone died. In the time of this conference, this hour, there's a good chance a Canadian died from COVID, just now. Because that's how the numbers work. If you just crunch the 9,000, Aaron would know the number, under 10,000, but in six months. Because people didn't really start dying in long-term care homes until really March. You're talking about every couple of hours a Canadian's dying from this disease. And around the world, in America, it's astronomical.

So, to avoid the abstraction, so we've got to really track the money being spent, the deaths that are happening on a daily basis. Which is why human stories, accountability, it just becomes more important. And I really think this is the moment where not being accountable is two things. It's facts and it's awakening people to arouse their compassion and their concern. And journalism's biggest challenge, especially in an oversaturated environment, is people just stop caring. It's shocking. In the United States, people just don't give a damn. You just say, oh yeah, I don't know, I don't wear a mask, 10,000 people, it's mostly old people. When did that happen?

There is a collective callousness just because you're inundated with so much crap. Reawakening empathy, reawakening concern, that's part of our job as much as delivering facts and accountability. That's why I go back to Aaron, his stories are so particular, so human, that it's bloody hard not to feel it. So the facts and the emotions combined with real journalism. I think that's where it really matters.

Randy Boswell:

Thanks Evan. Much appreciated. I'm going to narrow in a little bit on the accountability function. You've all mentioned it as something that despite the need for journalists to obviously amplify the public health guidelines and inform people about what's necessary to stay safe, that function has not abated. And that it remains central to what we do.

But this is all happening at a pace that is unprecedented in many ways. Evan, you just talked about the amount of money being spent and the decisions being made from day-to-day and week-to-week in many cases, about what to do just as a human being. I feel for the decision makers who have to respond to this unprecedented situation. Maybe they didn't do enough preparation in advance, maybe they short changed public health budgets. But nevertheless, here we are, in the midst of this almost impossible situation.

And yet we want to hold people accountable. How do we balance our need to be critical with a recognition that even the politicians and the public health experts are scrambling to figure out what to do? Charelle, maybe I'll start with you.

Charelle Evelyn:

I don't know if I would say that there's a need for, it's going to sound callous, I don't know if I'd say there was a need for that balance. I mean the stories for the most part and the reporting that's being done, it's not personal. For the most part it's not personal attacks against the decision makers. You're scrutinizing and criticizing the decisions that they've made. Yes, everybody is under an immense amount of stress, everyone's resources are strained. But questioning why somebody made the choice that they did, does not mean that you're telling a story that says so and so is a horrible human being because they made this choice.

Their choices have a real significant impact on people's lives. And you have to be able to look at them and say, "Okay, you made this choice. This is the fall out or this is the potential fallout. Tell us why you did it and tell us why we should think that this was the best decision to be made with the information that you had." If we look back at, in the spring or early summer, where people were talking about masks and Dr. Tam was saying masks aren't needed, the science isn't settled. Masks might not necessarily be the best way. And people were getting really angry. But that doesn't mean that the question should not be asked, as to you said this at this time and now you're saying this. Give them a space to explain themselves, give them a space to tell us what the information is. Provide the data. If we don't ask for it, we're not going to get that information.

So just because a decision has been made, doesn't mean that they get off "scott free" because the science has changed. We are creating the record as we go. Just because information now says X, doesn't mean that just because I said Y two, three weeks ago, three months ago, doesn't mean that you don't have to answer for what changed in that amount of time.

Randy Boswell: You raised a good example with the mask issue. Obviously, journalists were reporting what was being said early in the pandemic about that particular way of stemming the spread. And then the advice evolved over the course of weeks and months and that was a clear example of something that Ed Yong mentioned in his talk earlier, as an example of where there needed to be a lot of scrutiny around that particular issue.

Obi, do you want to weigh in on how do you keep people accountable in this challenging environment?

Obi Anyadike: I think Evan raised a good point that we can do both. I think what's interesting, there's a distinct difference it seems from the kind of media reporting in the United States or in the global north from the Global South. I think particularly where I sit, there's a history of public service reporting. I think that's happened, people kind of fall in quite naturally to a certain extent with this megaphone approach. Partly because the horror is an unregulated social media. Legacy media here is quite weak to a certain degree. It's been undermined by the falling ad revenue. And legacy titles are under pressure.

There's a very vivid and very loud social media world, where you have these conspiracy theories thrown around. I think in a sense the media sees their role as trying to play a careful balancing role in this kind of pandemic. Secondly this sort of public service function, there's very little questioning about vaccinations. Even during the Ebola crisis in the few countries where that was an issue, the governments were very quick to jump on these conspiracy theories. I think that was a positive attitude taken and I think people appreciated that.

Below the surface there are some "nutters" out there, as there are globally. I think the media, the mainstream legacy media, sees their role as trying to correct the public record to a certain degree.

Randy Boswell: Thank you. Aaron.

Aaron Derfel: So this issue of accountability, I think it often arises just from the subject matter, from what you're covering. You recall early in the pandemic, this has now become a well-studied story, the *Diamond Princess*. Canadians, and there were others, who were stranded on that ship for, they were supposed to be 14 days, but it was longer. It turned out that the ship had become an incubator for the virus. I was tracking it. I was speaking to a couple from Montreal who were on the ship. Initially it was understood, you had to wait and they would tough it out.

But then they were complaining to me that they were not getting information. They weren't getting information from the Japanese. Then they started to criticize the Canadian authorities that they were not getting information from the Canadian Embassy. They were criticizing the Canadian response. They were supposed to be repatriated. So I started to write about that. It comes with the territory of why was Canada waiting? Canada was responding after the United States. The United States had taken the decision to repatriate US citizens from the ship earlier and then Canada belatedly.

So that occurs with speaking to your sources. Picking up on something that Evan said, that I found really surprising. In Quebec, early in the pandemic, the premier was giving his news conferences. And it struck me as quite odd, as he and his entourage were leaving the press room, all the camera operators in the hallway just burst into spontaneous applause. Why were they doing that? I couldn't understand why they were applauding the premier. Yes, early on there was this feeling that we're all in this together, we must be united. This solidarity. We must maintain solidarity.

For me, at least in Quebec, I think a turning point came when I reported on what was going on at the Herron. And you saw that most of the staff had abandoned the residents who were lying in their own feces, who were dehydrated. And that came as a big shock. I think for me at least it marked a turning point, that it's okay as journalists to move away from purely public service journalism to asking tough questions. I think that's when things changed. And we saw a lot more critical journalism.

Certainly during the second wave, lots of journalists in Quebec are asking tougher questions. I think that's just part of our function. We will report on what the government is doing. When the government announces that there's this new pandemic alert system, green, yellow, orange, red, we'll report that. But then it's entirely appropriate to scrutinize this and to ask questions. You're announcing these colour coded alerts, but what are the numbers to back this up? When are you going to move to this? What's the justification to move from orange to red? And when you do move to red, what are you going to do? Are you going to shutdown schools?

I think it's entirely within our purview as journalists to ask those tough questions. But I agree entirely with Evan in the sense that early on there was this strong sense that we had to rally behind our leaders. As a journalist I've never felt that I had to rally behind my leader. So that, I found, was not a natural fit for me and that's just who I am.

Randy Boswell:

Thanks very much. Evan, feel free to continue down the theme of accountability. I also have another question for you, which is that over the months you've probably interviewed any number of public health experts, and I know you've talked to many politicians. I wonder about the way that you approach that balance on a very individual basis. I mean some of these are people you probably know well. But there are public messages that need to be shared, to help citizens understand what they need to do. At the same time, you've got someone in the chair that you need to grill.

How do you balance that in the search for accountability?

Evan Solomon:

Well first of all, I agree with Charelle. Our job is not governing, we're not governing. They have their job, we have to be responsible and fact based and we report on the news. But when journalists decide we're going to join the priestly class and kind of hold hands and pretend we're a deputized sheriff and we're part of governing, this is a terrible moment. We'll report on public messaging. I'm not an epidemiologist. So you know what I do? We had Dr. Sharkow, we had Dr. Bogosh. I want a doctor, hey, is this the right thing to do?

The first thing is you go to experts who you can fact check. And those experts are doing that job anyway. It's built into the DNA of a good story that they're telling it. You don't have to say, "Well we better tell," we're not elected to do that. Why? But we have to report on the story, that's the first thing.

The second thing is memory is the enemy of governments, and the friend of journalists. And in fast-moving events, people forget. I'll give you some examples. The politicians are now out there with their "aw shucks, we have to cancel Halloween." Nobody wants to cancel Halloween. And they're really good at it. And everyone's like, "Gosh, he's a real good guy. Gee, that premier's so great. Gosh he really gets me."

But if you forget that they didn't anticipate the second wave that every single doctor said was coming, if you forget that the strategy here was rapid testing as the big tool before the vaccine. Then they completely screwed that up. If you forget that, in going madly off in all directions, that they did some very good and some great things and some not great things, they found themselves in that. The fact that schools are closing again because they didn't invest, some governments that cut schools, cut teachers, underpaid front-line workers, stopped minimum wage from going up. The very policies that when the pandemic hit, they're out there saying, "These are our heroes. We need to give them more money. I can't believe long-term care homes are so bad," after they were cutting long-term care homes. Privatizing them. These are the very people accountable for these very problems.

When you strip the system and it becomes vulnerable, it's very convenient to come in as the hero at the last minute with a cape on. Politicians don't want people to have memory, which is the requirement of journalists. Let's just remember how we got here. You cannot have accountability without context. And context requires memory. And that's why journalists who have a beat, who have been doing their jobs, have to bring those questions.

Politicians hate that. Like hey, why are you bringing up that? It's in a new situation. That's just straight up BS, okay? The truth is accountability requires this, because when the pandemics over, they'll return to that. And every politician, make no mistake, many of them are all good people, they're decent human beings, they're in it to help Canadians. I understand that. But they are also here to survive and stay in power. And they're weaponizing a crisis for their own self-interest.

We've got to balance that. And the final thing I'll say to answer your question Randy, I know a lot of these politicians, not buddies of mine, but I've probably been on Parliament Hill longer than most of these people. A lot of them are new. I've seen them come and go. They come, the cycles are there. If you've been covering politics for 20 years, these guys are, oh they've been on Parliament Hill for five years. I mean they don't know anything.

But it is my job and I talk to them on background, and I don't mean this because it's not a game, it's our democracy and lives are at stake here. I always tell them, it's not personal for me. But it's very much like playing hockey or football or soccer, whatever, when the whistle blows, I'm coming. I'm going to do my job. I am doing my job. I'm going to grill you on the facts, I'm going to make you accountable. Because that's my job. It's not personal. Charelle said it exactly right. After the interview, they're human beings. I don't wish them ill, I'm not going after their families, I'm not hitting below the belt. Because guess what? There's so much material above the belt, we don't need to go below the belt. Above the belt is where the action is.

So I don't have any problem with someone on my program being as tough as I can be. Not for the purpose of confrontation because Obi will know them and everyone on this call will know, these politicians are all trained. They have a very elaborate scaffolding system of comms people, who before they go out, have trained them specifically to stay on message. They're coming with a praetorian guard.

So, we have to get through that. And if we ask, and they do it insidiously, one question, one follow up, no questions. We'll pick who's asking the questions. All of these strategies like, "oh you followed up twice, that's so rude." Rude? Why? Because you ran out of your talking points? We have to do our jobs. And they have to do theirs, I don't begrudge it. Good for them, they're going to have their comms and their team and their strategy. But we just have to ask, it's not personal. Charelle's exactly right. It's rigorous and impersonal and we just have to continue to do our jobs.

I honestly have, when a politician comes back with, "oh I can't believe it, you're such an asshole, you were so rude," I have to, and by the way sometimes I blow it. No one's perfect. No one's hitting 1,000. Sometimes I do an interview where maybe I was a little over the line. I agree. And I often go back and forth with the politicians, hey, I'm always there. If you think I was a bit of a dick, okay. I get it. And guilty as charged.

By the same token, are the questions fair? Are they what's needed? Are they in the service of the people of Canada? And if so, my job is to go as hard as I can to get that answer. And if I get it, great. And if they're offended and it was fair, not dirty, I could really care less. My job is not to do their job, my job is to get answers.

Randy Boswell:

Thanks. There's been a thread of this throughout a number of the comments. I think both Obi and Charelle talked about this. We're in a difficult moment in the history of journalism globally. Resources are tight. The ability to cover complex stories isn't what it was a few decades ago. And I'm wondering about, in that context, especially when governments have a number of the tools that Evan just referred to, getting access, getting answers, following stories in an in-depth fashion that is required when it's complex can be challenging.

Obi I wonder if you can start us talking about that challenge. In other words, how do you be a watchdog in an era when there are tremendous challenges just institutionally for journalism to perform that function?

Obi Anyadike:

It's extremely hard. As I said, legacy media is in trouble. It was never particularly robust to begin with. Politicians are masters at deflection. They also can vary their stories and they can threaten and manipulate media, especially in regions of the world where politics is a little bit more bruising than other places.

I think what's interesting is perhaps there's changes afoot. Not talking about any specific countries, because as I said earlier every country is different, but I think we're starting to see maybe a shift in models. We need to look at what model can work now. And increasingly we're accepting that whole idea of a philanthropy-supported media to a certain degree because it's so hard to make ends meet.

I know in Canada there's actually been government bailouts of the media. I think that would be very difficult in some context, because obviously that kind of flies in the face of the neutral position that journalists are meant to play. It's difficult. But I think

that, God bless the journalists who do go out there and challenge. Obviously there's been huge issues around misappropriation of money. Suddenly there was a shit load of money landing and how do you follow that? Especially when media is kind of challenged to be often jacks of all trades. We don't have specialized investigative journalists to a certain degree, that's kind of bit thin on the ground. So to follow Montreal is a little bit hard.

But I think politicians have to respond and try and respond to those sort of broad sides that the media still do fire at them. Where the problem is I don't know about in the rest of the world, I think it's pretty much in the rest of the world as well. Politicians can be quite shameless. You can have them banged to rights, you can confront them with whatever lies they've uttered, you can confront them with suddenly they seem to have an awful lot more money than their salaries would suggest. But how do you pin them and hold their feet to the flames? Mixed metaphors.

So those are just some of the challenges. There's many more, but I'll pause there.

Randy Boswell: Great. I'm going to give the others an opportunity to address this. I'm going to turn to Charelle to weigh in on this question of in an era of tight resources, how we manage to follow stories in the way that we might like in our watch dog roles.

Charelle Evelyn: At *The Hill Times* I think we're in a particularly lucky and fortunate position. We're an independent company and we've actually been growing in this time of shrinkage if you will.

We have a newsroom of about 12 people, which is basically unheard of for a specific bureau. But that doesn't mean that it makes it any easier to do what needs to be done. People right now are scattered to the wind. Learning how to navigate the new environment that we were all in was incredibly stressful. How do you do your job that you're accustomed to doing in a noisy boisterous newsroom or up on the hill from the solitude of your own home? I haven't seen the majority of my coworkers in seven months face-to-face.

And that all ties into how you do your job and how do you cover the news and bounce ideas off of each other. And just the very fact that Parliament had more or less shutdown, that had a huge impact on how we do our jobs and some of the tools that we use to do our jobs. Government offices, bureaucrats in the public service, they decided that things like A tip officers, access to information officers, weren't essential. So you're not getting, you can't get documents. Papers on the order question, questions on the order papers that MPs submitted and get answered by the government, those weren't being filed digitally with the Library of Parliament.

You had to find all kinds of workarounds to get information that was normally, if not readily available at least accessible. So that all feeds into it. And then there's also the idea of how do you keep the doors open? Because everything is changed, advertisers aren't advertising to the extent that they are, because their businesses have shutdown. All of these things tie into how you do your jobs, not only keeping the mental health of your own reporters at the front of the line and making sure that people aren't working seven days a week, like Aaron is doing. Even though it seems that was his own volition.

- Randy Boswell:** I take it that's part of your role at *The Hill Times*? You're commandeering the troops basically? Sorry, more metaphors.
- Charelle Evelyn:** Yes, that has to be part of it. You have to check in and say, "How are you doing? Can you do this?" And sometimes you have to push people and say, "You know what? I know things are hard, but we need to get this done and we need the stories to be done in a way that are useful and accurate and compelling." And there's also times where you say to people, "Take a holiday. Just take a day off. Take a week off. Just leave because you're no good to anybody and to our readership if you're entirely burnt out."
- So that all feeds into how you keep people accountable. You have to keep yourselves together.
- Randy Boswell:** Thanks Charelle. I'm going to quickly move to Evan on this point, just because I know Evan you have to take off to do your show. If you can weigh in on the question of resources. And then I'll come back to Aaron.
- Evan Solomon:** Okay. Just two things. This is a really difficult time for journalism, as we all know. But it's also a big opportunity. Journalism's perpetually in crisis for lots of reasons. The pandemic has, in some sense given us more access to more people, but less access to revenue. Revenues have plummeted while audiences have gone up. So it's this kind of crazy conundrum as we all know.
- There are three things I will just quickly say. I want to first talk about what Obi said. I thought that was incredibly important, especially for us in Canada, to realize. The relationships to governments, to legacy media, are totally different in the Global South and the Global North. And especially when you have a borderless world where, I don't want to get too bonkers here, but the kind of Westphalian world, from the treaty of Westphalia, the 1600s, which really established a world based on respect for nation's borders and nationhood is ending. Because we're facing climate change and pandemics and almost all the existential crisis facing the world are borderless crisis. And the mechanisms that we have that were postwar mechanisms, liberal mechanisms like the United Nations, the global trade networks, those have collapsed because they've been either dysfunctional, or they've been undermined by all sorts of international political reasons and distrust.
- So we have very weak mechanisms. Then you get, for example where Obi works, we have very little good information coming out of a lot of the Global South for three reasons. One, our bureaus, we don't have our own journalists there from our organizations. Basically, all of our foreign bureaus are shut. Two, the domestic difficulties within some of these countries, as Obi would know better than anybody, has made that situation really difficult to thrive and do journalism. For political reasons, authoritarian reasons, economic reasons.
- In an information world, we're getting massive asymmetric, false information. The void is being filled by conspiracy theories that have been, as I said, weaponized by governments for self-interest. really just can't tell you Obi how much I appreciate just hearing that, because I really think in a world where we're trying to deal with global vectors on things, on a crisis like this, we're not getting great information.

And that's a crisis of journalism, because it's an ecosystem. When *The New York Times* shows up in Mali or when *The New York Times* or the CTV, CBC or BBC shows up in a country, they can put a story on the map that will actually feed local media and force governments to act and there's an ecosystem. But when they pull out, it allows governments to avoid global scrutiny and it makes it much more difficult on local media.

There's a whole knock-on consequence in the ecosystem. The second thing I'd quickly say is governments aren't the only thing that have become so sophisticated at muzzling media and getting their message out. That's their job, they're going to get more sophisticated. Social media platforms, the Facebooks and the Googles have used a very bogus fig leaf to pretend they're technology platforms and not journalism. They call themselves technology platforms, but to avoid any of the conventions that we all function under as journalists. While they not only scoop up our stories, because they're the best aggregators and amplifiers, but scoop up the very resources that we all depend on and then say, "Well we're not journalists." But they actually are.

And Zuckerberg's lack of responsibility on any form of journalism has been one of the colossal info crisis and challenges for any kind of, not just journalism, but for democracy. We have to deal with that too. And the answer to that is creativity. There are going to be entrepreneurs that will figure out how to aggregate eyeballs, and I would just say that the great innovation that I always think is a great story. When my kids were born, kids didn't read anymore. Reading was dead. And then some single mother named J.K. Rowling, forget her current crisis for a second, and wrote *Harry Potter*. And kids were reading 1,000-page books. Why? Because it was a hell of a good story.

I'm just telling you, technology is dangerous or great or whatever you make of it. A good story will cut through. A good story aggregates interest and is powerful. That's not changing. How those stories are told, where they're told and the medium that they're told on, whether it's on wood like a newspaper or on a Zoom call, but a good story is the most powerful journalistic weapon. And in this time of crisis, telling good stories and Aaron's the best example. He looked in his neighbourhood, he found a good story. And guess what? It happened. We literally have an example.

So for the young students out here, a good story is still the gold for journalism and for democracy. And for change. And it's all we've got. It is the sword you've got. And when you abandon that for some fancy trick, good luck. Because it ain't going to work.

Randy Boswell: Thank you Evan. I know you have to leave.

Okay Aaron, I'm going to hand it back to you for some thoughts about that particular challenge. I know you've referred to it as well, about having both the time and the resources to pursue stories and what your particular solution was in this case, but how challenging is it for a newsroom in this era to be able to confront a story of this magnitude?

Aaron Derfel: The big question a lot of people have is will this pandemic become an extinction event for newspapers? In particular, the newspaper I work for, which is owned by Post Media, is receiving wage subsidies from the federal government. What will happen when those subsidies run out? Will some newspapers fold? Post Media, early in the pandemic, did close some weekly newspapers.

And this threat is not going to go away. I've tried to respond to this in my own way, which is essentially to work for free. I mean in addition to my day job, I do get paid. And that's subsidizing my Twitter thread, which actually requires hours and hours of work. So that's subsidizing it. If there's any silver lining, it's that people on Twitter are noticing and they've decided to subscribe. And every chance I get I will write down the hashtag support local journalism.

So I think that what I found is people want quality. They want quality journalism. And if you give it to them, they will appreciate it. And I've found that among some of my followers, that they've either resubscribed to *The Montreal Gazette*, or have decided to subscribe for the first time. I'm doing my own part modestly, to raise the quality of journalism. And in so doing, spur interest in it, spur interest in supporting it.

Randy Boswell:

Question for Obi. In this discussion, the focus of the Canadian participants has been on public health tactics, alert levels, masks, spending on testing and so on. But you've spoken about the broader picture, of the impact of the pandemic. Such as the impact of the economic decline on people's lives in Africa.

When you read or watch media coverage from the Global North, what do you observe about the range of the subject matter they address? To be specific, what are the gaps that you see? The issues that media in rich countries do not seem to be investigating with enough rigor and consistency?

Obi Anydike:

That's a great question. And obviously if every media ecosystem is different, it's difficult to generalize. The key difference I think is politicization to a certain degree, of the crisis maybe in the Global North. The issue of what Fauci is saying versus how Trump is responding. And that becomes an issue of politics all on its own.

From where I sit, that's not quite the same. I think we're dealing with more, not significant, but I think we're dealing with some really difficult challenges around holding governments accountable. Reporting on the local impact, is also something that I think we can do better at. But increasingly we're beginning to see that.

Then looking perhaps, because in a sense this crisis, as I said, is less a health and more an economic issue. Maybe what's missing and I'd like to see more of is: so what do we do now? And I think it's trying to build back better, to use that kind of horrible phrase. Okay we have a crisis, what happens next? Africa's going to take a massive hit. As the world will as well. But in terms of a number of countries that are already struggling.

There's pre-existing issues around conflict. Pre-existing issues around poverty as well. The poverty for sure and the development and downturns as a result of COVID are only going to get worse. What's the next step? How do we act, either individually as a country or collectively as a region? I think the whole issue around social protection and I think that's kind of shown in the way that a number of northern governments are kind of taking for granted, is that you can, in a sense, protect vulnerable populations. In a number of other regions, that has been something that wasn't possible politically, perhaps until now. The whole issue of a welfare state was something the governments perhaps would frown upon, even just in terms of subsistence programs for farmers was a bit of a political hurdle to get over.

I think we're now beginning to understand and accept that we really need to be able to preserve the most vulnerable members of our communities. And that has a knock-on effect in terms of what that means for education for girls, what that's going to mean in terms of micro businesses and restarting economies. I think I've veered off the question now. But in the Global North you have some particular issues that are shared. But I think in much of the Global South, the vulnerabilities are so much worse. I think that needs to be recognized. I think in a sense there's always been this trope that African governments are unable to cope, that the situation will degenerate into, I don't know, people falling sick in the streets and health care not being able to manage. I think what we need to recognize is that a lot of governments have been dealing with significant public health crisis for quite a while, and they're quite good at it.

And that's an untold story. In a sense governments have responded within their means relatively well. So we've had the lockdowns, which had an impact. But in terms of people's standards of living, the governments in a number of cases have been aware of the need to lift as well. We've had lockdowns and we've had easing, that's allowed people to restart their businesses and that's been a way out of what was getting to be quite a significant issue.

Institutions have been weak, but we've also seen positive responses from CBC Africa, who've we've started to see a health-care system that had been degraded for quite a while. We're beginning to see the significance of why you need a robust health-care system. We're seeing laboratories come online that weren't before. So, there's been a knock-on effect, which has been quite positive.

And we need to also flip some of the questions that we've seen. I mean recently there's been a rash of stories n why isn't Africa worse off as a result of COVID? And I think there was a very interesting review by a journalist who's based here in Kenya, saying that we need to flip the script and not ask why; it's not that when the world suffers Africa must suffer more. We need to flip the script and say, "Why has the West failed so badly?" Or certain regions of the North failed so badly in simple things like wearing a damn mask.

Wherever you go where I'm based in Nairobi, it's standard that you wear a mask. I mean that just seems really bloody obvious. But that hasn't been an issue. So there's a number of tropes I think we need to address. I think I'm well aware I've spoken too long so I'll pause.

Randy Boswell: No, thank you very much. And thank you Ira Shapiro for that question. We're down to about four minutes, which simply leads me to invite each of you to wrap up with anything that comes to mind from the discussion. Whether it's picking up on a thread that you wanted to make a point about or some other subject that we haven't talked about.

Charelle have you got further thoughts you want to just throw in there?

Charelle Evelyn: I'll just throw this in as a final thought. As we talk about accountability and holding people accountable, I think that as journalists on a broad scale, we do a pretty good job of parsing what stories need to be told, depending on what the crisis is. I think when it comes to public health, there's been, as we've been talking about it, there's been really clear delineations of being a good watchdog.

In other forums, not so much. I'm thinking about the issues about systemic racism and police brutality. A lot of those cases, the megaphone is often given to the wrong voice and the level of scrutiny is put on the victim instead of it being flipped around. So I would just say that out there, think about that watchdog element and that accountability element. And make sure that you are applying the lens to the correct voice at the right time. Because it's not always the same all the time.

Randy Boswell: Right. Thank you for that. Lots of evidence this year of all years for the truth of what you're describing. Aaron, your turn.

Aaron Derfel: I guess my final thoughts would be, I think we have to stay humble as journalists. What I mean by that is we have to listen more to readers, to our sources, to the public. And when we screw up, as we have, as I have, we have to own up to it very quickly. And I'm aware too that the more hard hitting your journalism will be, the more you open yourself up to scrutiny. But then you have to own that, and you have to be able to defend your reporting.

So, I guess those would be my final thoughts. Just to really stay humble and to be open minded.

Randy Boswell: Okay. Thank you very much. Obi, final thoughts? And that will wrap us up.

Obi Anyadike: I'll be quick. I think it's to worry about what this impact is going to have on the media. I think there is some online revenue growth that we've seen in some countries — in Nigeria, South Africa. I think we really need to think on this continent about how to really negotiate revenue share with Facebook and some of the big social media tech giants. And the continent needs to think collectively about how to do that.

The aid industry, which I kind of in a sense report on, don't use people's crisis as a way to fundraise. Have a bit more nuance in the messages you send.

Randy Boswell: Thank you. I do like the positive note out of all of that, that maybe there's a growing recognition of the value that journalism has demonstrated throughout this pandemic. I think that probably includes both the watchdog function that's been so vital in shedding light on problems with the way that this pandemic has been handled. And with the tragedy that it has inflicted on so many people.

And at the same time, I think also that megaphone role, where we actually are kind of a vital conveyor of information for experts and authorities, especially in the sea of disinformation, that has been astounding. I'm deciding to take that positive message away from our conversation. It's been really great to have all of your inputs in this conversation. And I will just wrap it up there with a thanks to all of you for participating.



JOURNALISM IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

PUBLIC POLICY

KEYNOTE DR. THERESA TAM

Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada's Chief Public Health Officer
Moderator: Josh Greenberg, Carleton University

Josh Greenberg:

Good afternoon. My name is Josh Greenberg and I'm the Director of the School of Journalism and Communication at Carleton University. I'm a professor in Communication and Media Studies and a researcher whose work focuses on media coverage of pandemics, risk perception and health risk communication during outbreaks of infectious disease. I'm thrilled to be joining you today and to introduce our next keynote speaker. Before doing so, allow me very briefly to congratulate my colleague, Allan Thompson, along with the team of student journalists who are producing some outstanding coverage in social media content, the conference organizing committee, the institutional partners for this conference and all of our journalism faculty, staff and students. Congratulations on 75 years of excellence and leadership in journalism, research, education and training, and for putting together such an outstanding event.

I've worked with Allan for 15 years, and I can tell you he's been going full tilt for months to bring this event to fruition. And while it's online and not in person, as we would have preferred, I think it's given us an opportunity to bring together some amazing speakers from the worlds of journalism, public policy in public health, who might not otherwise have been able to attend, had this meeting been on campus and in person. And one of those people is our next keynote speaker, Dr. Theresa Tam, and as a media and risk communication scholar specializing in public health, I've followed Dr. Tam's work for the past few years and particularly closely for the last eight months. I hope you'll join me in recognizing her tireless public service and the commitment she's shown to protecting the health and well-being of Canadians during this period of heightened risk and uncertainty.

Dr. Tam has been Canada's Chief Public Health Officer since 2017. She's a physician with expertise in immunization, infectious disease, emergency preparedness and global health security. As the federal government's lead health professional, Dr. Tam provides advice to the Minister of Health, supports and provides advice to the President of the Public Health Agency of Canada. And she is empowered to communicate with other levels of government, the voluntary and private sectors and Canadians on important health issues. We're thrilled Dr. Tam accepted our invitation to be one of this event's marquee speakers.

Those who have followed media coverage of the COVID crisis are used to hearing from Dr. Tam almost every day. Her daily media briefings are not only intended to keep journalists apprised of the evolution of this outbreak and its impact in Canada, but to also ensure that Canadians are hearing directly from their top public health official. Rarely, however, has Dr. Tam had the time or opportunity to speak openly about the challenges of communicating with the media and with Canadians broadly about this highly complex and challenging disease. Being skilled in media relations and risk communication in this context demands a deep understanding about the increasingly fragmented media scape in which we all live and work, from which we gather our news and information and where we share what we're learning and how we're feeling with others.

Dr. Tam will speak for approximately 15 minutes after which there'll be an opportunity for you to pose questions. It's now my privilege to officially welcome our keynote speaker, Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Theresa Tam.

Dr. Theresa Tam: Good afternoon everyone. I'm really, really pleased to be here for this incredible event. I would like to acknowledge that I am on the traditional and the unceded territory of the Algonquin Bay people. And I'm really pleased to connect with you from your various territories and communities that you are in today. Congratulations to the Carleton School of Journalism and Communication on this special anniversary. I think the pandemic has really shone a light on the imperative for reliable science space advice to keep Canadians safe. Effective communication of public health advice is as important as a vaccine. I've always said that whether it's this pandemic or others, we may not have a vaccine or specific treatment for a while. So the communication and getting the general public to do all the things that they need to do to try and protect themselves is of paramount importance.

Learning from each other is so important and taking the opportunity to do so. I learned a lot from great journalists and risk communications experts, one of whom is John Rayford, my colleague, who unfortunately passed away about a year ago, in 2019. I know that he had a sort of special connection to Carleton as well. A quick reflection on how I find the whole thing, a bit sort of surreal. In public health, I always say the population is my patient rather than an individual. That means collective approaches, dealing with many complex health challenges. We are often behind the scenes promoting health and preventing illnesses so that people don't see us very much.

We are somehow invisible, although one of my jobs is communicating with the public. But now as Josh reflected, since the pandemic started, every minute of the day, you see one of us, myself, other chief medical officers on TV and other media providing information. I think I've done over 100 press briefings and as many teleconferences with chief medical officers and deputy ministers in order to do my job in providing advice and helping to really gel some cohesion among medical officers of health, recognizing that health actually resides in the responsibility of the problems with territories and local public health. But it's important I think for the general public that we provide that sense of community and cohesion.

When I think about my job, in many ways, my job and that of journalists, we have many of the same goals. We share information to promote and protect the health of Canadians. We seek out the highest quality of evidence and we have to remain open to evolving evidence. And we offer our skill and talent to the service of others and for the greater good. Public trust and confidence in public health officials and our advice is essential during a pandemic so that the public, as I say, can protect themselves.

So, the media is an important partner to what we do. For our part, we have to facilitate a good understanding of how things work, how did this virus transmit, how does it behave? Are there any changes in what's going on in the country in terms of the epidemic? Journalists, fairly offering opposing points of view, reporting our results, and playing the role of the watchdog, obviously holding to account policy makers and politicians and many others. I've been really very impressed to date with how everybody's come together with the public as a country to help understand the transmission of COVID-19.

I think if we all stood back and maybe move the clock to a few years from now, we will look back to how extraordinary the event we are experiencing now is. We are

all bearing witness to not just a health matter, but the significant impact on society, on the economy. When 87 percent of the global student population was affected by school closures at the end of March, when I saw the prime minister and the president of the United States announce that there are going to be border restrictions on the world's longest international border, that was an astounding announcement I think in the history of these countries and globally, and many of our businesses retooled to generate personal protective equipment and other equipment that the country needed.

Society as a whole mobilized to respond in many different ways that we haven't seen before in recent memory. As the pandemic evolved after planking that first curve, we're now seeing how communications sometimes can appear to be inconsistent because the pandemic is different in different parts of the country. We have different experiences and contexts. Public health authorities have put in measures that have to be titrated against the epidemiology, but the context they work in, I think that's the moment that we're living in now, and it's a challenging moment. What we're trying to do right now is to continue to keep the public listening to science-based advice.

But the core public health messages we wanted to convey, and that hasn't actually changed that much. The core message is physical distancing, we are all on the same page on that. The frequent hand washing, wearing a mask, staying at home when you're sick, avoiding overcrowded rooms with poor ventilation. But we are living in a more challenging period, I think right now, to convince people who are fatigued to stick to sustainable habits or public health practices.

I'll just touch on a few of communications challenges that I see from where I'm sitting. Of course, as this pandemic began, it had to evolve and our knowledge on the pandemic, on the virus evolved in real-time, and because of our work and the work that journalists have done, and many others and scientists, everyone has access to information in the internet age, everyone is an armchair epidemiologist. They all think they know how to interpret information, but the very nature of a pandemic is extremely complex and there's a degree of uncertainty that changes over time.

As the CPHO, I'm in a very complicated situation. Advice and decisions are complex, they're not black and white, yes or no, someone makes a decision. So it is very challenging to externalize some of those complexities, which we can't do because we have to provide information to the public that's in a usable format. So of course, we have been criticized as public health professionals for changing our advice at the time, but we have been doing so because the science is evolving, and the classic example is the wearing of the non-medical mask. As we evolve our understanding, particularly at a point when we understood that asymptomatic people can transmit, then everybody wearing a non-medical mask can protect each other and reduce transmission, even in the light of quite frankly, just case studies or reports.

There's not a huge amount of evidence, so we kind of have to move even in that context to provide advice. As science evolves quickly, this kind of change is to be expected. That would be very helpful for journalists to preposition that at the same time, as a way of trying to do this. Science is playing out in real-time in front of TVs and the internet.

Scientists who normally debate things behind closed doors, in journals and having peer review, aren't doing so anymore. Clinical trials, every time there is an adverse event, it gets reported when normally, there would be a very thoughtful process of evaluating all of these things and then communicating it. So that is extremely challenging. The word "public" is in public health. You've got to put public into public health and realize the public will have their own intuitive views on what makes sense, and this shapes compliance. They will make their own decisions on how to behave under certain circumstances. Therefore, we have to make the information usable. I think the next challenge is having new ways of communicating more effectively as communicating, is challenging I think for the public health professional and we can learn a lot more perhaps from journalists.

My predecessors have never had to deal with a pandemic in this internet and information age. I wasn't a person who was on social media a lot in my private life, quite frankly, or in my professional life, not so much, but I saw my Twitter account being used. We're trying to use it more effectively, but that only reaches a certain audience to build trust. But the people joining Twitter has escalated tremendously at the beginning of the pandemic, and I've had to learn to, and my team had to learn to, "Well, how do we use that tool more effectively?" I think we can perhaps have a discussion on misinformation and this information that travels, as I said, faster than the virus can travel in this internet age. People can only tolerate sort of small sound bites and videos.

The new ways of graphically representing complex information, I think we need to do that better, but maybe there are others out there who can help us do that as well. We need those tools to provide that sort of consistent messaging that is going to be useful to people. I think in this second resurgence of the pandemic, we're seeing a different demographic of people being impacted. The younger adults, younger Canadians, and we really needed to adapt our message and be more targeted. We have a very diverse population in Canada. We need different ways to reach different populations as well in more visually appealing ways as I said. We're trying many different ways of engaging with young people right now, including using sort of gaming concepts and companies, as well as the usual internet and social media platforms.

We're seeing the growth of expert debunkers. You have some understanding at this conference that websites are now charged with doing that. I think the public also has to learn more about being more media-savvy, as well as being scientifically more informed. The third challenge, I think with this pandemic, we need to be pretty humble about our experience in Canada, because of course, it has shone a spotlight on the cracks in our social systems and how systems where a number of different groups in our community are disadvantaged by inequities. As this virus and this pandemic unfolds, we all have witnessed the significant gaps in the way of how we treat our seniors, and how we are treating those in a lower social, economic power, if you like, and personal support workers and other essential service workers who are on the front lines of the response and not being supported.

And we've had to escalate that kind of support. It is a magnifying glass on the cracks in our system. It is incumbent upon public health where we are the proponents of health equity, the champions, the voice of inequity and trying to do that on a chronic

basis. But this pandemic has created an opportunity for all of us to give a voice to those who cannot speak as loudly and seek diversified sources of information. Who your sources are matter, gender equity, having inputs from diverse populations is really important to the information that we all put out. So in closing, I think this is a very, very complicated dynamic and situation that we're working in that's constantly evolving. I believe the challenge that's been laid out before us, this pandemic, is a marathon that is going to continue for a number of months.

We've seen this uptick in cases now in the fall and until we have a safe and effective vaccine, communication is extremely important and to sustain behaviour change will remain absolutely critical for public health intervention, even when we do have a vaccine., to carry people through this period of fatigue. We need to continue to protect those at higher risk and those who are most disadvantaged by our social economic gaps. We mustn't forget that we live in a globalized world and that none of us are safe until everyone's safe globally as well. We've witnessed incredible collaboration between sectors, housing, support for people's wages. We've seen all of these people coming together, industry. So we need to move forward as we think about the future of pandemic preparedness, to be much more multi-sectorial and engaging pandemic plans. I think we must build health equity fundamentally at its core.

No one has a crystal ball and I keep saying that when I'm doing my mumbling sessions, translating that information and forecasting things, that no one has a crystal ball, but what I do know is the path that this pandemic will follow in Canada and globally depends on individual and collective action. That much I am certain. The stakes are high. You and I, journalists, have an extremely valuable role in sharing the information that saves lives, literally saves lives. So it's very important that we continue to depend on fact-based foundational science informed and reliable news media to support these efforts. Thank you.

Josh Greenberg: Thank you very much for those insightful remarks Dr. Tam. We move now to the Q&A portion of this session. I want to begin by starting on the topic of misinformation which you spoke briefly to. Some of our own research that we did at Carleton in partnership with Abacus Data this summer found that about 46 percent of Canadians believed at least one common myth or conspiracy about COVID-19.

Among them, the false link between COVID infections and exposure to 5G wireless technology, hyped benefits of hydroxychloroquine for treating infection, false claims that SARS-CoV-2 was manufactured as a bioweapon. Why do you think so many Canadians are vulnerable to the spread of misinformation? And what threat does this pose not just to public discourse, but public health in Canada?

Dr. Theresa Tam: That's a very big topic and I'm grateful for academia and Carleton, for example, that has provided some of this public opinion research, which is really important to do. It's a bit late doing clinical trials in the middle of a pandemic. You must do it, otherwise you wouldn't know where the hydroxychloroquine did or did not work or a certain vaccine. So, I think there's probably many different reasons why we are susceptible to misinformation. I think when the situation's evolving and there's a level of uncertainty that creates a fertile ground for people to provide all sorts of conspiracy theories and inject other information that can have very serious consequences. Unlike pandemics of the past, it's not a lack of information but it's too much information.

So people don't really know what's credible or not. It's like information junk food, this is how I look at it amongst maybe all the junk food there's some nutrition in there somewhere. But the bottom line is people are curious. They're using technology to make sense of the world around them. They're eager actually for more in-depth understanding so we need to actually provide it to them. Social media, everybody knows it is a double-edged sword. It's great. I used to do research and look through index Medicus and then try and find the paper and photocopy it. Now you have it all at your fingertips, but you still need to, if you really want to truly understand the topic, either spend a lot of time doing research or rely on people like Ed Yong, who does very in-depth analysis in order to translate complex scientific information and the contextual pieces in order to provide the information to people.

During the pandemic, I believe a lot of people at home are sitting in front of the television. So of course, they're consuming a lot of information. Whatever is put in front of them, and television channels come from all over the place, whether it is in the United States, Canada, I think we share the same channels so people are getting different news. I think there was some research, maybe it was your group that did it that shows that people get the news mostly from social media are the most susceptible to this misinformation.

And conspiracy theorists are saying, "Do your own research," when quite clearly people can't do that very well and they have to be directed to more credible sources. I think partly it is public health that needs to sharpen our social media skills if we're going to convert misinformation in that sphere. We have done the analytics of course, of what that landscape looks like. And public health is sort of in this little echo chamber talking to each other while some of the anti-vaccine groups or others are spreading information in much more effective ways, so we kind of need to get into it basically.

InfoDynamics and tracking at the WHO have a whole stream of workforce actually doing that, and public health doesn't have much capacity and you have to build that capacity in order to provide that information. We can do regular media briefings and I believe TV is still a key venue for people to get information. But we are not as good at the compelling, visually strong engaging public stories. I think journalists use that tool, that device, much more effectively than telling that human story.

We rely on you digging down to that. Because we provide statistics and behind every number there is a human story. I think the journalism superstars understand that and can translate the complex into human stories that people can relate to. And I've challenged the public to use a bit of time to get media smart, to try and think critically and ask themselves three questions, including where did this information come from before I pass it on? I think everybody has a bit of a role as to why we're susceptible to so much information junk food.

Josh Greenberg:

That's great. I'm going to start digging into the questions that people following along at home are submitting. First one is from our colleague, Sarah Everts at Carleton. Vaccine hesitancy was already a public health issue when the pandemic hit. Now there's a president using a COVID vaccine as a lever for re-election, raising fear about cracks in the regulatory process. Obviously, Canada and the United States have

different regulatory mechanisms, but the fear and unease doesn't really respect the border. So what are your thoughts on how to broach unease and misinformation about a potential COVID vaccine in Canada?

Dr. Theresa Tam:

So that's a bit of a bridge from the last question too. I think as we all know, there's been an incredible global scientific endeavour to discover and research new vaccines. Some of these vaccines are in trials right now, and from where I'm sitting the public, although they appreciate the rapid research, the words rapid and quick engenders a certain amount of concern. I think how I've tried to approach it is to communicate that regulatory process being fast tracked doesn't mean you skip the safety and effectiveness studies. Safety being the most important aspect I think to what the public wants to hear about. And as the clinical trial results are popping up all over the place, people are not respecting peer review journals. These pre-prints and in fact, even beyond the pre-prints is some sort of median announced by company X or Y prior to the normal process of scientists and independent experts reviewing it is extremely challenging.

But helping the Canadian public understand the regulatory process is one really critical element. And there actually are some very good Canadian scholars, behavioural scientists, and others that have been studying the vaccine confidence prior to COVID-19. And some of the theories are particularly important to our current context. One is that, of course, as much as possible, you want to immunize people ahead of the misinformation. Only because once a piece of misinformation out there, it's very difficult to retract.

I know that social media companies are trying to take them down if it is egregiously wrong and point people to credible sites, but once it's out there, it's really difficult to pull it back. So, one of the techniques is pre-information inoculation. Uncovering not just the facts about the vaccine and being transparent about the regulatory process, but to help people understand the kind of techniques that people who deliberately or otherwise put out misinformation use. The kind of conspiracy, sort of approaches, the fake experts.

You have got to search for, "Who is this expert," just because they have a doctor in front of their name, who exactly are they, are they qualified to speak on the topic? Selectivity and cherry picking are other techniques that people use, whereas good scientists, journalists present each side of the argument and tell you what we know and what we don't know. So cherry picking is another technique and unrealistic expectations. We've never said that the vaccine was going to be 100 percent effective, but people pick up that concept of unrealistic expectations. So, we have to go out there and set some expectations.

Even when a vaccine is safe and effective, we're going to use it, but that doesn't mean it's going to be 100 percent effective, it's just another layer of protection. I was told that I was such a downer, but I was just trying to be realistic when I was communicating that this is not a magic solution, and we may have to continue some of measures, hand hygiene, everything else afterwards. Inoculating the public with the kind of techniques that they're going to be subjected to is one tactic. Then I think, of course, cause and correct, and tackle misinformation. I said engaging social media companies to do their part, being more engaged in those space, even though to me

that is frightening because I don't know the social media space, but you kind of have to get in it.

Use some of the same techniques that people trying to spread misinformation use ourselves and use influencers, parents. One thing that I think we have to spend more time on is actually knowing, through public opinion research, that people trust the health professionals, trust their family doctors, is to give them enough information so that they can explain things to their patients.

Josh Greenberg: You've spoken in your remarks about COVID being experienced differently in different parts of the country. And even within the province of Ontario, experiences are varied. So there's a question here from Jack Wilson about enforcement measures and the messaging across jurisdictions, there have been different approaches to the balancing of enforcement and communication. In some jurisdictions breaking public health advice can lead to fines or even a prison sentence. Do you see this enforcement as helpful or as harmful to the broader project of communicating good sound, public health advice to Canadians and how much enforcement of these rules do you think is necessary or important?

Dr. Theresa Tam: Again, there's no yes or no to this is question. I do have to stress that I think social cohesion is very important to the collective response. I think if we bear that in mind and go, what helps with that? What helps because individuals and collectively as communities, if we all don't recognize our role, it will be all over the place. We can't control the spread of this sort of invisible virus if we don't support that. So that's been the underlying approach I've always taken. You can also look at sometimes providing those roles in certain contexts that really helps. If you are a store owner and it's up to the public whether they maintain physical distancing or wear a mask, it'll be all over the place.

It will be very frustrating for them and people will not take public health advice under those circumstances. If you ask the public, they will say it actually helps to have those rules make everybody do it, because otherwise it's too much for us to think about. It's too complicated. Just removing that decision from us will be very helpful. I think that is important. Now, there are people who, of course, we enforce the federal quarantine act, for example. And even we try to use a gradation of tools. You don't use the biggest tool that you have until you've educated someone and say, "Well, by the way, that is unacceptable."

It would depend on the degree to which someone is not following the quarantine act and what on earth they're doing and how much they are endangering others and that is assessed on the ground at the local level and local police forces will do the jurisdiction and will be able to assess what they are. I think it's a gradation. I personally think that whatever you do has to maintain the public trust and cohesion, but sometimes it just makes things easier.

Josh Greenberg: Okay, I think that is a very good insight. A question from Carleton, from the school, what do you make of President Trump's treatment of your US counterpart Dr. Fauci, and in what way, perhaps if at all, has that affected the way that you go about doing your work and the relationships that you have either with the media or with politicians?

Dr. Theresa Tam: I don't want to comment on the US situation if I don't know enough about it, but for sure, I think we try and give advice to our decision makers, and by the way, I don't make those mega decisions, it's not my decision to make. Making sure that I provide that science-based advice, but that they recognize that being a fundamental principle is very important. I do wake up every morning being grateful that on the whole, the decision makers of all political parties and others have in general been thinking about Canadians and the pandemic and managing that. Politics is always at play, but in general, compared to other countries, I think things have been generally well managed, and I'm very grateful that I'm not in that situation.

But I have to say the United States still has a lot of great scientists and on a technical level people connect and communicate to share scientific information, that is really important, but it's a lot of pressure on public health professionals. I mean, I think there's been different journalists who've looked at how much pressure public health leaders or scientific leaders are under. I certainly feel it personally, but I have to refocus myself and go, "Okay, I'm here every day just to get out there again, just to provide the information," but that is extremely stressful. And I don't know about Dr. Fauci, he looks pretty calm, cool and collected, but maybe he's feeling 100 times what I'm feeling, I don't know.

I think it does help when the public realizes that what our job is opposed to that of decision makers, but how much pressure we're actually under, not everybody likes what we say, we resigned to that. There's a lot of people who would tell me that I'm not doing the right thing, too fast, too slow, too soon, too much, but I think I don't make decisions singularly. I think the strength of having the tables connect with other medical offices of health so that we can manage this challenging situation together.

Josh Greenberg: That's great. We've talked a lot about the challenges of dealing with COVID fatigue, of quarantine fatigue. And you mentioned in your opening remarks and before, all along in fact, that we need to think about this as a marathon and not a sprint. Marathons are exhausting, I know, as a marathon runner, both of us are marathon runners or try to be when we're not working. And they're tiring. I think we're seeing that Canadians are beginning to fatigue around COVID and as we move into the winter and grapple with the second wave, this is going to be a big challenge. So another question from Macklin is what are the steps in your view, that journalists can take to encourage people not to fall prey to COVID or quarantine fatigue?

Dr. Theresa Tam: I think we are trying to set the expectation that it is going to take months, but we know a lot more, we have a lot more knowledge than we did before and we can use that knowledge, we know what works. And I do think having sustainable habits in using the measures is going to help us sustain the response so that it's not an extraordinary thing anymore. It's just part of going about safely in one's lives, that's one thing. But I think give people some milestones to look for, even in the vaccine fear, we know that the pathway, we don't know for sure, but we're going to come back at some point in time and be able to provide more information, but everybody is working really, really hard in finding those solutions and it is very important to motivate people.

I do think that there's a sense of creativity and ingenuity that we need to do to reinvigorate, because it's about adaptation. Adaptation builds resilience, not just for this pandemic, but for other things, or the hard things that our society is going to encounter. So building that mental resilience, physical resilience, community resilience is very important. I'd certainly like to take some advice from journalists as well as to how you do that. The youth, the young adults is a big piece to this, as I said, being able to engage them in different ways. If it's gaming companies, let's have a go at that. Giving people agency I think is really important. You can take control of your life. You can make these steps. They're not extraordinary. You can do it and you can do that in creative ways is one of the approaches I wanted to be out there.

I know we're probably not great at the tech talks and the other platforms, but other people are. If we gave you a boring video about wearing masks, can you turn that into something that someone can use in a more sustained way. Refresh the ideas, same ideas. We say the same old, boring things over and over, but maybe you can do that in more creative and more effective ways and do your research and continue to adjust us as we go along.

But as I say, some of the biggest milestones coming up it's going to be what happens to the vaccines. And I think we can all do well in getting ourselves educated so that we can be very helpful to the public as we take them along that journey. But our vaccine does bring hope. Humans always survive pandemics, right? We've seen it repeatedly so that we know it is going to happen, but how long is it going to take? I think giving people a sense that we're certainly looking at next year as being likely that a vaccine can be provided, but it will not be there all at once. So how do we manage that together? I'm not sure if that's the best answer, but I'm also developing ideas as I'm going along, it's like flying a plane as you build it.

I think providing some behavioural science, behavioural insight-based approaches to this will be great for some segments of the population, maybe messaging about the economic aspects of it would be more effective for example. I think how we ensure everybody can then go to work or go to school if we all do our part and certainly protecting seniors and others might work for certain other populations as well., I think that we can get through this using research-informed communication approaches.

Josh Greenberg:

We are at the end of the scheduled time for this session. I know I could stay on and we could keep going for at least another hour, and there were a lot of questions that came in. We didn't have time to get to all of them but for those who submitted, I will pass those questions along to Dr. Tam for her reflection at the conclusion of this session. So I would like to thank you very much Dr. Tam for taking the time out of what I know is a very busy day to share these important insights and observations. We will close this special session with Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Theresa Tam.



JOURNALISM IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

PUBLIC TRUST AND THE ROLE OF JOURNALISM

PANEL

Moderator: Scott Mitchell, Carleton University

Speakers: Dr. Vera Etches, Ottawa Public Health; Jayme Poisson, CBC Radio;
Chris Waddell, Carleton University; Cary Wu, York University

Scott Mitchell:

Thank you for tuning into this panel, Public Trust and the Role of Journalists. We'll be exploring questions and themes such as how public trust has been affected by news coverage, scientific uncertainty and public health messaging.

The pandemic has put public trust in institutions under the spotlight and this panel will be exploring some of those challenges and opportunities.

Our speakers include Dr. Vera Etches, Jayme Poisson, Christopher Waddell and Cary Wu. We'll be introducing them in just a moment. They'll each be providing some opening remarks and then we'll have time afterwards for questions and discussion. We have a very interesting mix of backgrounds and experience here, including journalism, public health and research.

Dr. Vera Etches has been the medical officer of health of the City of Ottawa since April 2018. As head of Ottawa Public Health, Dr. Etches has led the capital's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. She previously served as Deputy Minister of Health. Dr. Etches is also an adjunct professor at the University of Ottawa, where she supervises medical residents in the public health and preventive medicine and family medicine.

Christopher Waddell is the former director of the School of Journalism and Communication at Carleton University. He led the university's inaugural chair in business journalism and was the founding director of its Bachelor of Media Production and Design program.

He joined Carleton after 10 years at CBC Television News, where he was senior program producer for *The National* and from 1993 to 2001 parliamentary bureau chief. He's the principal investigator for a planned study on how different generations of Canadians get their news, their health news specifically, during the pandemic.

Cary Wu is a professor of sociology at York University. His research focuses on political culture, immigration and inequality. He often shares his research with the public via national and international TV, radio and newspaper forums, including NPR, CBC, *The Toronto Star*, *MacLean's*, the *Financial Times* and the Conversation.

Jayme Poisson is the host of a daily CBC news podcast, *Front Burner*. She previously spent eight years as a reporter with *The Toronto Star*. She's been nominated for national newspaper awards and was part of the team that won the Governor General's missionary award for reporting on former Toronto Mayor Rob Ford. She's also won the Sidney Hillman Award for public service journalism twice for investigations into sexual assault on university campuses and ongoing mercury poisoning in Grassy Narrows First Nation.

I'm Scott Mitchell. I'm the moderator for this panel. I'm an instructor and Ph.D. candidate with Carleton University. My research includes public communication of science and risk communication and I'm a knowledge broker with the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction.

Vera is going to start us off with her presentation. Vera, thanks for being with us here today.

Dr. Vera Etches:

Thank you so much. It certainly is the case that trust in public health officials and the information that we provide is essential for public uptake of the preventive measures we need to control transmission of COVID-19.

We know that individual behaviour change is critical. There is no testing and tracing system that's going to keep this pandemic under control. In order to earn the public's trust, Ottawa Public Health, which I lead, is aiming to be timely and transparent. My role as a medical officer of health is to make sure that residents have the information they need to make informed choices, to keep themselves, their loved ones, and the community safe.

And we really rely on media partners to help shape our message and share our message. The media partners have been integral, effective communication is one of our best tools and journalists are effective communicators.

Here in Ottawa, I feel they've been asking the right questions. They've been fair, they've been thorough, and they are helping get stories out and important information to the community, but I just wanted to touch for a moment on what it takes. What's behind the scenes from a public health point of view, as we engage with media. I'm incredibly proud that we have a whole communications team that have been creating products in multiple different channels, whether it's social media, print or online.

We mail things to people using traditional media as well. And we have to do this in multiple languages, but it's the media relations team I think that's most relevant here today that we're discussing. And again, the volume of work that they've had to undertake is incredible. Three times the number of media inquiries that we get in a whole year in just six or seven months, and each inquiry we take as a priority to get the right information to journalists so that they can share accurate information with the public.

We definitely had to pivot to doing media availabilities rather than one-on-one interviews with different media outlets almost every day initially in the pandemic. And it hasn't stopped. We've had to continue at least twice a week as usual, eight months later, because the information keeps changing and there's always something new to let the public know about, to make sure they're informed, and they can adjust as the pandemic changes and what needs to happen changes.

So it certainly hasn't slowed down. We do respect that journalists want one-on-one interviews. I try to make myself available for that as well. And it is a trade-off in terms of the time that I need to be spending with my team, leading the response, responding to things, internal work and work with partners. It's sometimes hard to prepare for media availabilities and very often we've been looking at information right up to the last minute before we speak with the media, because we're trying to make sure that we're always informed by the latest questions that are coming at us from different channels.

Again, my inbox, the complaints, inquiries and compliments, the social media chatter, we want to be able to speak to what's most relevant to people. We take that all in and prepare for our media availability.

The other thing we've noticed in terms of one-on-one interviews with me as a spokesperson for the public health response, it's important to have access to other public health workers in terms of our epidemiologists who have the data, our case and contact tracers, and that hasn't always been easy to provide because we are stretched. We are still stretched responding, but we appreciate that.

I've started to speak a little bit about the challenges. I think I'll focus my next comments there. No surprise to everybody, one of the biggest challenges that we continue to experience is that information about the virus and the pandemic and the response continues to evolve.

As we learn more about COVID, we have to change, our guidance has to change. It's necessary. We should be adapting to the latest evidence and science. We would rather do that than stick with any outdated messaging or something that's not effective, but it does come with the added communications challenge of explaining why we are adapting or changing our public health guidance and messaging.

We do trust the public to make good choices when they have the right information. And we've been very open. I think we've had some success on social media explaining through Twitter threads for example, why information has to change on masks. I think this was a key one early on. We can talk more about that. This can't be easy for journalists either, to continue to adapt.

I think a second challenge is, and this might be different for Canada, but probably not. In other parts of the world, we have different levels of government from national, provincial and local. I sit at the local level and the public health authorities at those different levels have to speak for a broader geography with a very varied experience. I'm going to use Halloween as the example there.

Again, maybe around the world people don't celebrate Halloween as much as we do here in Canada, but it's a big deal. People love decorating. They love dressing up and going trick or treating door-to-door to get candy. And so the national advice on that is to mitigate the risk, to go about that trick for treating. And the national advice did say it may need to change based on what your local medical officer of health says, but that piece doesn't get picked up so much.

We're left at the local level trying to explain why our guidance might be more restrictive. That's one of the challenges.

I am so proud and happy to work for the City of Ottawa. It's right on the border with a different province with different guidance. And again, having that connection with our neighbours to overcome why there might be differences in policy.

I'm sure it will come up more. The challenge, the third challenge of misinformation. I guess some people have talked about that. It's just increasingly that there's more and more misinformation spreading. I think it's not all lost. I'm not sure the misinformation people are winning because we do see the effective behaviour change happening. We have turned the curve and flattened the curve through people's individual choices and behaviour change. So, I'm hopeful that people will, on the majority, continue to act on the best evidence they can get.

Lastly, I just wanted to speak to one of the challenges I see from a public health perspective, which is that traditional media channels do not reach everyone. When I speak to our usual larger media outlets, they are not asking me questions in languages other than English and French. But we have a very diverse population in Ottawa where we need to get messages out in more than those two languages. So that's up to us as a public health agency to make sure that we're using different channels.

I'll finish by talking about how important I think it is to continue to tell the story of the pandemic and what we need to do, and what's happening in different ways.

We've seen media outlets reporting on COVID fatigue, and that's a real thing when it comes to messaging. Because it's the same, the public health message is the same eight months later in terms of the basics. Wash your hands, stay home when you're sick, keep two meters distance from other people and wear a mask when you're indoors and you can't distance. That's probably not going to change for another year, right?

So, we need to find new ways. I think here again, the media is very important in terms of helping us tell that story. A story that helps people feel something, that evokes emotion, that is what people will remember. We have seen our media partners picking things up and using their own infographics, sharing things, stories of people who have recovered. I think that these things are important, as well as what I'm seeing emerge in terms of some positive stories about what can be done.

I'm looking ahead and in Canada we need to make it through six months of winter. That is looming. We are starting into that period. And I think it's hard when the messages are all about what can't be done and the risk. I'm hoping that our partners in media will also think about how do we continue to generate hope and positivity and that connectedness that will get us through this pandemic?

I'm looking forward to that. We will get through this pandemic. We'll hope one day, we'll just have the weather to talk about again for a while. I can't wait until our interactions with our media partners can be more in-person. It certainly is awkward speaking to a little black camera and not having the direct feedback as we engage with journalists to help get information across.

I think I'll end it there. I look forward to the discussion and the questions. I think that may be part of the most interesting part of this time together. Thank you.

Scott Mitchell: Thank you Vera. Next we have Cary Wu.

Cary Wu: Good afternoon everyone. Thank you for joining us. I'm Cary Wu, a political sociologist at York University.

Back in March, I received a grant from the government to study the dynamic of trust before, during and after the COVID pandemic. There were two questions in the research proposal that I asked. The first one is how public trust, including people trusting each other, or people's trust in the government or in media and people's trust in health professionals how that shapes public responses to the pandemic.

The second question I asked in this ongoing research is how this pandemic change will shape people's trust in each other, people's trust in the government and people's trust in the media. So today I'm going to show you some findings and some data, and some plans.

In the very early stage in March, I wrote and published an article in a sociology journal, *Contact*. So, first article, I look at this. In the United States, when at the state level, when states have more trust means that people are trusting each other, then the state is more likely to get people tested for the COVID-19 virus.

So the testing rate is higher in US states where people have more trust in each other. One mechanism, I would think, is that when people trust each other, it indicates the quality of the state government, right? So, high quality of the state government, better governors, better government then leads to a higher testing effort, testing rate.

This research has been translated into multiple languages. When there's trust, there's more testing. This is especially important including during stages of the pandemic in March.

Then my next paper. This is in the United States as well. When I look at the county level, the first map shows the confirmed cases per capita. And then the next US map is the social capital. So social capital, including social trust, people trusting each other, and also including people's trust in the government, which is also the social network.

You can see that where social capital is high, when counties have more social capital, they have fewer confirmed cases. And I also found the weekly growth rate is also lower in counties where there's more social capital. This shows how trust matters for COVID-19 response.

So, when we think about trust or think about social capital, Vera talked about trust as multi-level. There's a local level of trust. There's a national level, where people trust in local community level government and the people's trust in the federal level of government. These are different forms of trust.

Those different forms of trust could matter in different ways where they can matter in different responses, cross-nationally, when we think about trust. In some countries, for example, in Western society here in Canada and the United States, trust is very important. And people's trust in each other. But in a solitary regime, for example, in China, people's trusting each other maybe it's not so important that they trust in the government. Because they have very strict rules about compliance when control matters. But here, in democratic society, people trusting in each other matters more. Thinking about trust could be multi-level and trust could be also be trust in people, trust in media, trust in political organizations.

So those different forms of trust could matter differently for people's responses or government responses to the COVID pandemic, such as in the United States, when we think about media. If you look at it there, there is this trust in ABC, CBS, CNN and then Fox News. The trust in Fox News is so different from the trust in ABC, CNN. This is a simple analysis looking at how different specific trust regarding specific news sources differ from each other. For ABC, CBS and CNN, they're mostly low on single factor, but Fox News is so different from other forms of trust, specific trust.

For example, this is a simple analysis looking at how trust in CNN and in Fox News shaped people's mask wearing behaviour.

In the first wave, this data from the University of Southern California, a team that has been collecting the data over time, from March until September. In the first wave, data is collected in March, when people have more trust in CNN or Fox News. They both are more likely to wear masks in the early stages of the pandemic, but in wave seven, which is in July, June, you see when people have trust in CNN, they're still more likely to wear masks, but then over time, like more and more Americans have been wearing masks. You can see the goal, from wave one to wave seven, that mask wearing has been increasing. But you can see the differences between those two figures is that the second figure, when people have more trust in Fox News, they're less likely to wear masks.

That's how media, or Fox News or CNN, shape people's social distancing or their behaviour. I've talked about how trust can shape people's response to the pandemic. So, I'll also ask another question: how has the pandemic changed people's trust? In the United States, for example, this data shows that people's trust in the government, in media, in the president, in Congress, has been declining. In Canada, there has been an increase in all public trust. People have become more trusting in each other. People have more trust in the government, have more trust in health in Canada. Not media, in Canada people's trust in media has also been declining.

But most forms of trust in Canada have been increasing. One reason is that our government here probably has done a better job because trust reflects performance. So the performance could lead to higher trust in institutions, even in people. When people come together, they can form a solidarity. When we face a disaster, such as the pandemic, they form a sense of solidarity and people have more trust in each other when the government also creates a good institutional environment. You can see from March until June in the United States, ABC, CBS and CNN, people's trust in all of those media is declining. The pandemic has changed people's trust in institutions, in media. This is some data I'm sharing with you today. I look forward to the discussion at the end. Thank you.

Scott Mitchell: Thank you. Next we have Christopher Waddell.

Chris Waddell: Thanks very much, Scott. What I'm going to talk about is a couple of rounds of surveys that we did at the School of Journalism and Communication earlier this year. The surveys were conducted by Abacus Data. We wrote the questions. The first wave was done in early May, when the pandemic was going strong and we were doing a lockdown, then we did a second wave in early July when almost all the country had at that point moved into what you would call stage two, which was a sort of modified opening, but not a complete opening of everything. Some of the questions I'm going to talk about today, they're all about the media and about news. Some of them we asked in both waves.

There wasn't much difference between the two waves. They were pretty much the same in the responses. It was a project that was funded by the School of Public Affairs faculty, at Carleton. We surveyed 2,000 people for each of the two surveys. We weighted the results for usual demographic factors, a margin of error of 2.17,

if it was done on a traditional basis, but this was an online survey with a panel. The university disseminated the results. The news releases are all available on the school's website. And the results I'm going to talk about are the cumulative results. You can break this survey down by various demographic categories, whether it's education, age, family income.

We also split it by suburban, urban and rural residents so that you could see if there was a little bit of difference. In some cases, there are some differences, but I'm going to talk about the national results for this presentation. The first question we want to deal with is to what extent would you say you kept up with the news both before the pandemic and during the pandemic? More people were following the news every day, once the pandemic was underway. And we saw a shift in responses there. We also asked them where you're getting your news and information?

We asked them first to tell us all the news sources, and television news was clearly ahead. Two-thirds of Canadians say they get their news from television newscasts and news channels, search engines, government online websites, radio, as we moved down through all the different categories. Obviously, if you add up all the different online sources, online cumulatively is probably higher than television, but television is still a very significant presence. You may be a little surprised to see social media in fifth. But when we look at the top three sources, we've got TV at the top, then public health agencies, government online sites and it goes down from there. Social media is much lower in terms of the top three sources for people.

We also asked, "How good a job do you believe your local news media is doing keeping you informed about COVID-19?" And the result was very good, almost 80 percent of people thought the news media was doing a good or a very good job. That didn't change during the two surveys, it was pretty constant. The public seemed fairly happy with the news and information they were getting from the media. We also asked about the different types of news, local news, provincial news, national and international news. Because obviously, in the early days of the pandemic, international was very important in terms of what was going on in other countries, as we saw it getting worse in Europe and then coming to Canada. The results aren't too much of a surprise either. Both local and provincial news were deemed more important than national or international news by people because they wanted to know what was going on in their own community and what was going on in their own province.

But you've got a significant number, almost 90 percent, saying that international news is very important or somewhat important, which is probably higher than it normally would be on a question of general news rather than specifically on COVID. We also asked them which news sources they relied on for COVID-19 news information and how important different factors are in determining what they would rely on. And reliability of the information is the most important with about three-quarters of people saying that was the big determinant in what news sources they relied on for information about COVID. Relevance to where I live was important for half the people equally, the cost of subscriptions for online was almost half as well.

Compatibility with my opinion and worldview was very important, although it was a little bit higher for somewhat important. But not a surprise again, but it's encouraging I think that people were looking for reliable information and they felt that the reliability of information played an important role in where they were going to get information about COVID-19. We asked some questions about news and the cost of news and the ability of people to subscribe and what they would pay for. We asked, as you may recall most news organizations, those that were behind paywalls, made COVID-19 news free and removed them from behind paywalls. We asked if people thought it should be accessible online from news sites, free of charge. And we had, not surprisingly, about 90 percent of people said, "Yes, that all news and information should be free." And very few people disagreed with that.

We then asked whether they thought all news in general, should be free and should be accessible online, free of charge. And discouragingly enough for news organizations, about 80 percent of people thought that "Yes, all news should be free all the time. Not just COVID news, but all news." In other words, they didn't want to pay for any news online.

As we all know, and we've heard this morning, if you've been listening to other panels, people talking about the problems that news organizations are facing financially as a result of advertising and other issues that have been going on for quite a while. We said, news organizations are struggling to remain in business due to the economic downturn. And we asked whether people agreed with that or not. Basically, we've got about a third of the population that agrees with that. Another third, that either doesn't disagree, that doesn't agree or disagree. And then the final third, disagree. So, the ability of news organizations to present to the public their financial problems, it doesn't seem to be getting through to the public very well. And that's not something we've found exclusively, that's been a finding in other surveys as well. But even during the pandemic, that wasn't something that the public seem to understand or appreciate.

But yes, well, the access to free COVID-19 coverage on news, online news websites that normally are behind paywalls lead you to pay to subscribe to those news sites in the future. About eight percent say yes. And another 22 percent say maybe, so maybe a third might think about subscribing to news online as a result of getting free COVID coverage during the pandemic, a big chunk of Canadians won't though and that's consistent with other surveys we've done, and other people have done that look at people's willingness to pay for news.

We also asked about purchasing or cancelling a subscription to an online news site since the COVID pandemic began. And almost 90 percent have neither purchased nor cancelled. You've got about five percent who bought a subscription. You've got six percent who cancelled a subscription. For most people, it appears that the pandemic and the availability of news hasn't led them to be more interested in subscribing to news. And they still have strong opinions about their unwillingness to pay for news online. And I think that leads us to a few questions about social media.

How much content about COVID-19 have you been seeing on social media sites you use? And about a third said a lot, another third saying some, and the rest saying not that much. Again, not that third, third, third split we see on this one as

well, but clearly for the social media people using social media at COVID-19 was fairly prominent for a lot of them. Next questions, do you disagree or agree with the following statement? The spread of misinformation about COVID-19 has made me more cautious about the accuracy of content I share with others. Perhaps encouragingly, we see about two-thirds of people, somewhat agreeing or strongly agreeing with that. The degree to which at least in May and July the message about misinformation being spread about COVID-19 and the need to be cautious about that, if you're sharing information with people, was getting through for a majority of people and seems to be having some sort of impact.

Have you accused someone else on social media of spreading misinformation based on content? Almost 80 percent of the people said no with three percent who said yes, they're obviously probably see the most active on social media. But clearly spreading misinformation is something lots of people said they weren't doing, whether in fact that's true or not, we don't know. And misinformation was not a widespread activity for most Canadians. We were also interested in how often Canadians check the various social media platforms. What we found is that Facebook, YouTube and Instagram are popular, with Facebook being clearly the most popular.

If you combine Facebook and Instagram together, obviously it's owned by the same company and increasingly being integrated into one, but they are clearly the dominant presence on social media. YouTube is fairly significant as well. You've got 20 percent of people saying they check Facebook several times a day and another 17 percent saying they're checking once or twice a day. And that number goes down as you move to other social media platforms. Snapchat, LinkedIn, TikTok, Tumblr, Sina Weibo, they're all down in very, very, very low numbers in relative terms. We also asked people if they didn't check at all on the site and if they'd never heard of the site. Facebook is at the bottom of this list, which means more people were checking Facebook than anything else. YouTube is next.

You'll find about 60 percent of the population, almost two-thirds of the population in fact, are not using them at all. And in some cases, they have never heard of them. So, to wrap up with some quick conclusions, Canadians thought the media handled the pandemic well in May and July. The survey also found them very positive about the performance of public health officials and governments. Mainstream media, both in their original format and online, remain very important sources of news and information for Canadians. Television is most prominent, which is nothing new, television has been the most prominent for quite a long time.

And as I said earlier, if you add up all the different online sites and online sources, they may be higher than the total for television, but many of those online sources are repeating what is actually initially being published by mainstream media. So mainstream media is clearly still very significant and disseminating information. Canadians still have little interest in paying for news online. The traditional numbers have been about nine percent. The most recent Reuters Institute survey of countries had Canada up at 12 or 13 percent of people saying they'd be prepared to pay for news online. But the answers on the questions about do you think all news should be free online all the time are pretty discouraging for news organizations that are struggling to survive, which the public doesn't seem to be aware of for the most part.

Making COVID news free online during the pandemic may be good public policy, but it may be a bad business strategy because it seems to reinforce a sense that if you get something for free, that's what it's worth. There's no real evidence that making COVID news online free to the public made people more interested in subscribing. That's a connection they weren't really making, at least in May or June, July. And finally, all the attention paid to misinformation online does seem to be making Canadians more cautious about ensuring the accuracy of things they share. Facebook is the dominant social media platform. That is reinforced if you combine the results of both Facebook and Instagram. As for the frequent focus on social media during the pandemic, I think it's important to know who's not on social media. And that seems to be, as it relates to COVID-19 news, about two-thirds of Canadians, except for Facebook and YouTube. Obviously, different surveys can produce different results, but that's what we discovered at that time as it relates to Canadians, and how they thought of news.

Scott Mitchel: Thank you, Chris. Next, we have Jayme Poisson.

Jayme Poisson: Hi, everyone. For those of you who might not be familiar with the show, I host *Front Burner*. It's a daily CBC news podcast. Generally, we launch an episode every day and it drops at 6:00 a.m. It's about 20 to 25 minutes long, and we [cover one subject]. What we decided pretty quickly when things started to get very real around March was that the story was moving so fast, faster than any story I have ever worked on, the amount of information and changing information was really quite something coming at you. It was moving so fast and there was such a desire for clarity that we launched a second podcast, which we dropped into our feed every day or a couple of times a week.

We just decided on the day of, if there was a prominent question that we needed to answer, we dropped that into our feed at the end of the day. And these were shorter episodes, maybe 12 or 13 minutes long. And we tried to tackle a very specific COVID question. Our morning episodes were often still COVID focused. It was just COVID all the time in March, but we really wanted to give our listeners the opportunity to be able to go through our feed and say, "Oh, this is a piece of information that I need. I'm going to listen to this quick 10-minute discussion trying to explain what's going on with testing in Canada right now, or why the WHO just declared this a pandemic." So, what are some of the things that we talked about a lot as a team and tried very hard to do in order to engender trust?

We timestamped most of our conversations, which may seem like a small thing. But as I mentioned before, the story was moving so quickly that we were always trying to remind our listeners that this is Tuesday at this time, this is the information that we have right now. This is what's coming out right now because it was changing all the time. You're always trying to remind people that this could change tomorrow. This advice on masks could change tomorrow. So that was really important. It was important for us to make sure that we put the product context around all the discussions that we were having. Scientific studies, for example, we would never cite any study without having a conversation with the person you're interviewing about that study — is it peer reviewed? Is there a broad scientific consensus? What's your take on the validity of the study?

The validity of the study, I think it's important sometimes to talk about the size of information that's coming out. A lot of this was coming out as it was being done, that doesn't mean that we shouldn't report on it, but it's so important that we put it into the proper context. Another thing, we had a lot of discussions about as a team was finding experts who are excellent science communicators and could speak to our listeners in a way that was easy to understand and seemed fair, down to earth and real.

For example, Dr. Isaac Bogoch is a regular expert on our program. I find him to be just an incredibly effective communicator. Not only is he using plain language and often employs sports analogies to discuss COVID, but also I find that he's quite honest. I remember once in his tweets he was willing to sort of criticize the government, if he thinks that it is warranted. I remember, one time I asked him about testing as there was a lot of discussion around testing. This was right early in the pandemic and the prime minister's wife, Sophie Gregoire, had COVID and the prime minister kept saying, "I don't need to get tested. The advice is I don't need to get tested." And I remember asking Dr. Bogoch, this doesn't make sense to me that he doesn't need to get tested because all of these other countries around the world are saying, test often, test as much as you can, if you've been in contact with anyone with COVID get tested. Is it possible that we just have not got our act together around testing?

His answer to that question was his opinion obviously, but it was honest and it was fair. I think that we've relied on people that we go to often. And I also think that helps build trust with listeners too, if they're often hearing from the same people over and over again, like Dr. Michael Gardam with Humber River Hospital, I think he's out east now, but he's an excellent communicator as well. Kamran Khan is doing incredible work around data right now, he's basically predicted sort of how this pandemic was going to spread. We've relied heavily on recurring characters on the podcast, I shouldn't call them character for recurring experts, to help us wade through how the complexities of this story.

We fact check all of our episodes, and I think that's an important thing to say as well after recording. Obviously, we do a lot of research beforehand to make sure that we get the questions right, and get the information right, and then we fact check them afterwards. Sometimes that means that they didn't go out, the afternoon episodes in particular, as quickly as we might've wanted them to. But we felt that it was really important to take that step so that we didn't have to pull things back.

Another thing that we focus heavily on is that as soon as we started seeing confusion around specific issues, we thought this is where we need to jump in. So hydrochloric, when Donald Trump was touting the benefits of hydroxychloroquine, let's do an episode on that, let's get it out quickly, let's try and figure out what the scientific consensus is here. We recently did one on Regeneron that Donald Trump again, was calling a cure. This is the monoclonal antibody cocktail that he received, and Dr. Bogoch came on and explained that this is still a very experimental drug, that's not available in Canada, that we don't have the data, do you not know if it's secure or, and I should say it's not a drug, it's a therapy. And we sort of we went through that step by step.

I think that's an important role that we played in building trust with our listeners. We talk a lot about the context around what we know about these drugs or these

therapies right now. We also tried to spend a lot of time debunking misinformation, which I suppose is related to what I just said. But there was a theory going around that the virus had come from a Chinese lab. We wanted to do an expert interview with an episode on how there's really no evidence on that, that it was largely thought to be a conspiracy theory. We spend quite a bit of time researching these episodes, as much time as we can for a daily show, so that we are able to deliver a broad scientific consensus.

The other thing I'll say to try and engender trust with our listeners is that I think it's important to ask questions of both public health officials and the government throughout this process. We asked a lot of questions about the wobbling on the masks. We asked quite a few people why that was the case. It seemed to be intuitive to wear one, since I had seen doctors wear masks in hospitals all the time. So obviously they're working for something I don't understand since we're being told to not wear masks.

The argument that shutting down borders doesn't work, and then, all of a sudden, we *are* shutting down the borders. Why the quick turnaround on that? And then I think it was also fair at the time, and it's still fair to ask the questions, of the response of government officials, as this virus was on their radar quickly, they seemed to have been caught flat footed. We did not have enough PPE, you have hospitals begging the government for PPE and this great, great shame. In long-term care homes and our inability to protect them. I think these are important questions that still need to be asked, and I am sure that we have not gotten sufficient answers to any of them quite yet, at the same time, it's important to be fair. I think Canada was caught flat footed, but so was the majority of the world, so where we can put that into context is important as well.

It's also important to question some of the messaging from public health officials. Dr. Etches has just mentioned that the messaging around Halloween, I know that local health officials have different advice, but even that advice coming from public health officials which several experts disagree with that. I think that's an important discussion to have, and the podcast is a really good environment for that, because we can get into the nuances back and forth, and really kind of digging into it. I also wanted to mention that Dr. Etches talked about this idea of fatigue. It's always very important to try and tell a compelling story.

For the podcast, it's not like people have the radio or the television on in the background. You have to physically take out your phone, open up your podcast app, and click on the episode. We're trying very hard to make this an enjoyable experience for people to get their news, and that's not lost on us on a daily basis. I think that also helps build trust too, to try and draw people into a story. We put a lot of effort into some of the stories that we did on long-term care homes in order to get first person stories, to get families who have been affected from the front lines, migrant workers. We try very hard to put their voices onto the podcast. And I think that's a really important role that the media has to battle, that fatigue.

I will say even personally, I was feeling a bit fatigued in the summer, and I picked up the newspaper and my colleague, Jennifer Yang, had written this unbelievable piece about this young man in the Northwest corner of the city of Toronto who lost

his mom to COVID. And she told his story. He has autism, and he basically was left on his own with his little sister in their apartment while she was battling COVID in the hospital, and then she ended up dying and now he's left on his own in Toronto, and his father was on another continent.

I remember reading this and thinking to myself, wow, why am I complaining about not going to a restaurant? This is crazy. I think it's always important to remind ourselves, as journalists, that these stories actually do matter, that they actually do affect people's behaviour. And I know this because I've read or watched stories that very much affected my own behaviour or attitude. This is what we're thinking about as a podcast on a day-to-day basis, and I hope that we can continue this conversation.

Scott Mitchell:

I think these opening remarks have really given us a great starting point for our conversation. I'm sure we'll have many questions from the audience, but I'll start with a question addressed to the whole panel. This was touched on in some of your remarks, but in a situation like this, it's unavoidable that there's going to be some uncertainty or change in the evidence base or change in our understanding of that evidence base. Could any of you speak further to some of the challenges that this presents when we're communicating with the public and how we navigate those challenges in a way that maintains that really crucial trust?

Dr. Vera Etches:

I think I had made a couple of comments related to the importance of continuing to be transparent about what was said before, what we're saying now, and if there's a difference, why there's a difference, explaining what we use as evidence. Often in a time like this, especially early on, we have to act on incomplete information and evidence, it's not peer reviewed and acknowledged. So even at the time, saying there isn't much information about masks, we said that. And then the information that was showing there's asymptomatic transmission, that was not peer reviewed, but it had enough implications that we had to consider it.

We have to act on this information to change our policy, to consider that anybody out there could have COVID and could be a source of risk to others, and that was a big change for sure. It's gratifying to see that the evidence becomes stronger and is upholding the shift in approach. But that's one of the challenges, I think there are policy makers who won't shift until evidence is very clear and peer reviewed, and that's going to cost lives in a pandemic. We have to act fast in acknowledging the uncertainty and being upfront about that.

Chris Waddell:

I think one of the challenges that journalism faces in dealing with something like this is that journalism and journalists are interested in facts: what's right, what's wrong. And scientists never will say anything definitively because they're always waiting for whatever the next study might be or whatever the next result might be come along. When those two things are mashed together, they often don't work together very well. So, I think that's probably compounded in a circumstance such as a pandemic when many journalists are thrown into covering scientific and health issues who don't really have much experience in doing it. And I think that becomes a bit of a problem. How do you translate or how do you put information across to the public with the caveat that this is what we know today, but that might not be true tomorrow when we're used to writing stories that say this is what is the truth.

I think everyone's been grappling with that who have been trying to deal with the issue. I listened to Ed Yong this morning talk about some of that. And it's a problem, even for people who are specialists in the field, and it's equally even more challenging for people who may have been a general assignment reporter or doing this, that or something else, and all of a sudden, they are thrown into this as well. I think people have grappled with how to deal with it in a fair fashion.

Jayme Poisson: I would add, one thing that has been important is that you want to try and ask the questions that people sitting on their couches at home are wondering about, such as, why am I suddenly being told to wear a mask? Or when I was told to not wear a mask two weeks ago, why am I suddenly being told to go and get tested, when I was told two weeks ago I don't need to get a test. I think it's important to put those questions to trusted experts, but you have to also give them the space to answer and get into the nuances of this discussion. Dr. Etches was just saying that they are also grappling with this as well, too. I'm not saying it always happens, sometimes I leave interviews thinking maybe I wasn't fair, or maybe I could have been more fair, or maybe I didn't ask enough skeptical questions.

What are people wondering about? And then I'm going to give them the space to answer these questions. So sometimes you are just asking the question because you get a very satisfactory answer, and sometimes for some people it's not, but you just keep asking them anyway. I think it's why also I found the podcast format very helpful, because we have a bit more time to go back at something for a couple of follow-up questions just to give people a little bit more clarity.

Chris Waddell: And what's important in that is that the podcast allows you to do it. Whereas if everybody's watching television, they're listening for the four- or five-second clip and that makes it really hard as difficult issues aren't often explained in four or five seconds.

Dr. Vera Etches: Or in a few sentences in a tweet. So, our team has decided there are some things where we can't put it in one tweet and we're going to use threads. And, I feel sorry for them, as they're having to use more threads than they probably want to use, because there continued to be things that required that longer communication.

Chris Waddell: There's also a political dimension too, in all this. I you go back to look at the early days of advice about masks, some of the advice about not wearing masks related to the concern about the ability to have enough masks for medical personnel who were dealing directly with cases. But if public health officials start to talk about that, then the public asks, "Well, who's responsible for that?" Is it the politicians and they're the bosses of the public health people? There are dynamics and tensions in all of this that are more obvious than others. Clearly, in retrospect, when you hear people talk about masks, I know that the science of it was evolving. Some of the concerns relate to the political dimension as well.

Dr. Vera Etches: I find it very interesting as a medical officer of health because we fall into the category of physicians and doctors that have high levels of trust, but people do see us as government as well, which is an interesting role. We do have the ability to speak out independently where it's important for the health of our population. And that's a responsibility I have and an ethic that I follow, but I know there are different views. For instance, Jayme, you referenced a lot of your sources are infectious

disease physicians who are not public health physicians, and this is a public health pandemic. And there were sponsors that are required to control that, who are public health oriented, not the individual infectious disease care of a patient. So, it is interesting that they are seen as a more credible spokesperson sometimes because they're not associated with government.

Scott Mitchell: We have a question here for Jayme Poisson and Dr. Etches. In Dr. Theresa Tam's keynote session, she noted that members of the public can recognize credible information as opposed to misinformation when the journalist or the scientist recognizes a variety of perspectives or findings, rather than focusing on only a single simple answer on complex scientific knowledge that's still evolving. Jayme also alluded to the presence of sometimes conflicting science-based information and advice. Question, do you agree with Dr. Tam and this applies to new stories in the pandemic? And if so, how do you balance this need for a variety of scientific perspectives against the perceived need for clear information on which the public can rely on trust?

Dr. Vera Etches: I agree with Dr. Tam that it's important to speak about more complex issues and the more complex science that is out there. We still do have to be simple in our messages, if we're asking for action, but if we're looking for people to pick up a behaviour or do something that has to be simple. However, there are other forums where you can discuss things with more nuance. I'm thinking of, for instance, schools. Opening schools could that be a risk for COVID transmission to children who will then transmit COVID? There are lots of different signs there. We know this about children, and we don't know this about children. We can speak more if there's a specific subject, and we might choose to make a media availability based on one subject. We can go a little bit more in-depth around that and talk about what we do know and what we don't know and bring in more of the complexity around opening schools.

It's not just about COVID, it's also about the mental health of parents and children, and children's development. It's also about people being able to work and needing to get our economy recovering. I think sometimes we have to narrow the focus and go deeper. And that is possible. I do believe the public can understand complexities and acknowledge that there are unknowns.

Jayme Poisson: I hope this answers the question, but on very complex issues, the school one is a big one. I know this is a bit conflicting with what I said earlier, that we were trying to move quickly with the news, but we usually actually save those for our longer episodes and we try to give them more time. We work very closely with the CDC, health and science reporters, and our unit there. And our producers will call in multiple experts.

We spend quite a bit of time on the structure of the conversation to try to put it all in context and try to say if there's a majority of scientific consensus somewhere, we want to be able to say that, or if there are many reputable sources saying the same thing, we want to try and grab all of those and put them out there so that you're not trying to present two equal arguments. I think in cases like that, trying to wade through the tricky lines, when we can, we try to take more time doing them, and consult with multiple experts even if they don't come on the show.

- Scott Mitchell:** Thank you for those responses. We have another question. It asks, is there data on the extent to which the uptake in trust in government is attributable to factors other than the reliability of science and health information, such as demonstrating compassion and rapidly rolling out income support measures?
- Chris Waddell:** I can start on that. Although we haven't done much in the surveys, we did them in May and July when the income support measures were still coming out, and some of them weren't particularly clear and they were changing. I think probably the most it's not data, but it's a little practical. The New Brunswick government had an election in November or on September 14th, and a minority government got turned into a majority government. There's a BC election on Saturday in which the NDP minority government is going to most likely become a majority, if you believe what public opinion polls say. People who were watching what's going on in Ottawa in the last couple of days, suspect that the Liberals wouldn't mind having an election at the moment, if they had to, because the public has given them fairly positive response to the way that the federal government has handled the issue. I'm sure there's some of the good public opinion pollsters in the country, Abacus Data, Nanos, Angus Reid, Leger, those people have looked at some of those issues. But on a practical level, the way voters seem to be voting seems to be indicating their support in what government has actually done, and the surveys we did where we asked generally about how happy you were with, or how you rated, the performance of your local government, provincial government and federal government found back in May and in July, 65 percent or higher people thought they were doing a very good or good job.
- Scott Mitchell:** We have another question. Jayme, in a recent episode of *Front Burner*, you were speaking with Dr. Isaac Bogoch, and you were talking with him about this idea that rapid testing helps some of our issues, but not all. Something that struck me in that episode, and it's a long-running theme with your podcast, is that you strike this balance where you explore these sorts of challenges and issues that we're facing in the pandemic, but you do it in a way that doesn't seem alarmist or that gives fodder to maybe some sensationalist or distressing impulses. I'm just wondering if you could share anything about your process or approach to negotiating that balance and its connection to public trust.
- Jayme Poisson:** I think it's trying to find the time to structure the conversations properly. When you are moving very quickly, it's easier to grab onto more alarmist facts. It's also a recognition that people are listening to you. While it's been so important, it's more important for all of these experts and public health officials, people are listening to them, but people are also listening to us.
- I think the way that you try to navigate the questions themselves are important. How you pose these questions to experts are important. I hope that when you come away from an interview, the impression that leave is that it was fair. It could be tough, but hopefully it was fair and everything was given a fair shake.
- We actually try to spend a long time talking about this before we go into the conversations, sometimes days, sometimes hours online, now with Zoom calls with our team, trying to figure out if we're being fair. We don't always hit it, I will say. It's hard with this story in particular. I think when you don't hit it people will

tell you that. Then it's important to evaluate what you did and then maybe go back to it, if you can.

Dr. Vera Etches: I might jump in here, Scott, to say that as a public health physician, I actually don't have time to watch the news, but the team watches the news and if we come across something that is inaccurate, which doesn't actually reflect the evidence or the reality, we have reached out to journalists to say, "Can we chat about that? Can we offer some other perspectives?" People have taken us up on that, too. I really respect that, the ongoing dialogue to be able to give people the best information.

Scott Mitchell: Thank you. I have a question for Dr. Wu, and then perhaps others can also jump in. In your presentation, the way you were speaking about trust, you added this kind of interesting granularity to it, where we often think about it as trust or lack of trust. But you were talking about where we place our trust and the types of news, the different platforms, the different figures.

I'm wondering if you could speak more to that, to this idea that it matters where we place our trust and maybe some of the challenges when it's not that people are mistrusting, but they're placing that trust in, I won't name names or specific media outlets, maybe Fox News, but how we address that trust that's being placed on a platform or with a figure that perhaps it shouldn't be.

Cary Wu: A very good question. When we think about trust, really, it's multi-dimensional. Almost like the different forms of trust or the topic could be different. Trust in health professionals, trust in the government. The government we talk about national level and local level, community level. And people's trust in the local, provincial level means different things to people. If you trust in the federal government, it means something different too. That's political trust, institutional trust.

When we think of trust in the media, there were different news. Some like Fox News, CNN, so you see there is a political divide, huge political divide. When people have more trust in Fox News it is so different from others who have trust in CNN. People are divided by, for example, trusting Fox news and CNN in the United States.

Even in Canada people trust in CNN or Fox News. The finding I show is that where people, in very early stage of the pandemic, have trust. That trust in general could be a diffused type of trust. And I said, it is just people are simply trusting, or have a lack of trust. So that could shape people's mask wearing, but then when you're getting into a political debate, when people trust Trump or people trust Fox News, then they're less likely to wear a mask relatively to people who trust in CNN or trust in some other more liberal or Democrat kind of media. We also think about social trust as a type of trust and a level of trust, and also cross-nationally in different contexts trust matters. I talked about how in Western society, in more democratic regimes, social trust or close community trusts matters more than institutional trust, even in the political government or even in house professionals. So, with social trust, people care about each other, have concern for each other, and that matters more than people following the control matters from the top down.

For example, authoritarian regimes are top down and most of the control matters are stricter. Then you have to trust the political government and you're more likely to follow their rules. It's very simple in that way. But in Canada, it's more like trust also

matters in a different timeline. So early on, the government is still thinking about what policy will control policy, for example, when we don't have a lot of control policy in place, then social trust matters.

But when we have a lot of control policy or a mask-wearing policy, social-distancing policy in place, the social trust that matters less, the political trust become more important. Or trust in health professionals. Because if people trust in health professionals, they follow their advice. There are policy suggestions, such as social distancing, and wear a mask. So, it's not about social trust anymore. When we think of trust, trust is a multi-dimensional, multi-level concept and trust could also change in a different time, different contexts. So, it's a complicated concept trust.

Scott Mitchell: For sure. Thank you for your response. Does anyone else want to build off that?

Chris Waddell: The research that has been done in Canada and internationally suggests that Canadians have much higher levels of trust in the media than Americans do. There's a good survey done by Pew in early 2019, that looked at 25 or 30 countries and found Canada in fact was about 20 points higher than Americans in terms of trust in media. I think there's a variety of reasons for that. One of which is that media has been a politicized weapon by parties in the United States, going back to Spiro Agnew and Richard Nixon in the early 1970s, where the media has been denigrated as being liberal and other sorts of things. And it's become a political issue. It hasn't been politicized to nearly the same extent in Canada.

It really hasn't hardly at all in Canada. I think the public broadcaster in Canada makes a difference to public broadcasters, a significant presence in the media in Canada. And that plays a role in constraining some of the instincts to move toward more extremes in some media. I think another reason is that we don't have Rupert Murdoch. And I think that's a significant reason for the higher trust in media in Canada than in the United States, for instance.

And then the overriding reason above and beyond all that is if you want to get into big views of collective versus individual responsibility and individualism, and going back to the founding of our country versus the founding of the United States, where we tend to trust government more than Americans do, and in a situation like this, that makes a difference. Sometimes that works to our detriment too, when we are too willing to accept government's unwillingness to share information with us. But, there are big differences between us as societies, bigger than some people think. And that is reflected, I believe, in the trust in media and the two countries.

Scott Mitchell: Thank you, Chris. We have a question here for Dr. Etches. This is getting at the complexity of scientific medical information. As you and others spoke about in your presentations, clearly you want that information to be communicated to the public in a way that they understand. Also, the public is capable of understanding that kind of complexity and not wanting to oversimplify the facts. You've spoken before about the importance of storytelling. Do you think that storytelling helps us address that complexity?

Dr. Vera Etches: Absolutely. And I want to thank people for continuing that work in the media. What we're finding when we follow up with somebody who's tested positive about the second and third generation, what we find with the contact tracing, how quickly COVID

can spread from a social setting, into schools or into workplaces. And that relates to something that people can imagine when they are doing something, like having a party at a cottage or having a barbecue in a park. It brings it into a more tangible, “Oh, it could be me.” And then, “Oh, the consequences could be drastic pretty quickly.” I think it makes it more real. So we’ll continue those storytelling efforts.

We received feedback from our city counselors who reported that we need more stories about individuals. Individuals who have come through COVID, individuals have been impacted by COVID. To do that kind of reporting, you have to get consent. Which is probably more the domain of journalists. In fact, I think as you were saying, Jayme, it can be very, very strong.

The other thing we know is that the stories that are positive are harder to garner media attention. When there’s more conflict and there’s more angst or outrage that tends to get attention more than the survival, the supporting of each other’s stories. We acknowledge that, but I think that’s a gap in mainstream media that maybe we need to spend more time focusing on in public health.

Scott Mitchell: We have another question. Do you think the media’s tone towards government has been affected by the pandemic? Has it done anything to foster or lessen levels of public trust?

Chris Waddell: I’ll start. Okay. Let me pick up on something that Vera said though first. I don’t know if you saw it or not? There’s been some people playing around with some very good ideas of how to communicate some of the information graphically. The London-Middlesex Health Unit did an interesting one that was around four or five students at Western University who were going to school but weren’t living on campus, and they contracted COVID-19. And then a graphic demonstration of how that spread, by who took bus rides, who took car rides, where they shared a cigarette and that sort of thing. And some of those ways can be kind of interesting and ways to engage the public and persuade them how quickly it can spread. I saw another one that we didn’t know, it might’ve been an Ottawa one.

Dr. Vera Etches: Yes, we’ve been doing that.

Chris Waddell: Yes, that was the hockey team one? That was quite good and actually, they’re really great ways of showing people in a way that I think is much better than just trying to talk to them. Now I forget what the question was Scott.

Scott Mitchell: The question was asking if the media’s tone towards government has been affected by the pandemic and has it done anything to foster or lessen levels of public trust?

Chris Waddell: I don’t know how to answer that. I think it’s very difficult to describe the media as a monolith because it really isn’t. It’s a whole bunch of different organizations, it’s a bunch of different attitudes, it’s opinion, it’s news, it’s everything else. My guess is probably not much, but I honestly don’t know. Jayme’s smiling so she probably is smarter on this.

Jayme Poisson: No, I’m not. I don’t know the answer either, but I think it’s important to remember that journalists are people too and when you find yourself in a crisis, there is this tendency to rally, right? And I’m not saying this is a bad thing, but you want to

rally around, you want to try and deal with this crisis. I think as a journalist, you constantly have to check yourself there. There is something sort of patriotic about what happened in March, and everybody went home and stayed home, and the idea was that we were going to do this together. And I think that's really important messaging, but as a journalist, it's really important to constantly check yourself and try to remember are there questions on the table here that we need to be asking?

I think obviously there's broad consensus that this is not the time for austerity in this country, but our recent figures show that the Canada is spending more money than any other developed nation in the world. There are some real questions here about whether or not that money is being spent properly. I know that it's helping a lot of people, but I think that it's really important that those questions get asked now, very quickly. We don't want to ask them six months from now or a year from now, I think they need to be asked right now. I don't know if the tone towards government has changed, but I can see how it could, and I can see how it's important to constantly remind yourself to ask tough questions but what are the tough questions?

Chris Waddell: Yes, I think it's really difficult. One of the questions that has been debated to some degree is government relief efforts leading to disincentives to work. I don't think there's an easy answer to that in the short term. The answer is probably not very much, but we don't know the answer, whether it's going to be longer term because we don't know how long some of them are going to go on, but those are the questions that need to be asked. And at some point, on a political level, the debate about this has gone on the longest of any federal government without having a budget. I think people need to see how money's being spent as well as acknowledging that there was a lot of effort expended to get monetary help out quickly and early.

There are also good questions to ask about how it's being spent. Of course, the question some are asking is what are the long-term implications? Probably, on a political level, the people who think that the media is too friendly to government will still think they're too friendly to government afterward. And the people who think that the media are too tough on them, are probably dependent upon which political party they support, and you'll discover that people think the media is too tough on whatever party they happen to support.

Scott Mitchell: We have another question. How do you evaluate or measure the public's understanding and by extension adoption of public health directors? We only have four minutes left. So is anyone willing to respond to this question, please jump in.

Dr. Vera Etches: We've been doing polling and we've been doing engagement exercises online with individuals, inviting people to a dialogue about the different public health measures and letting us know what the barriers are to wearing masks? What do you think about wearing masks? And we've actually used that information to then communicate about mask use. The polls show, again, that rise in mask use that you had on your presentation Cary. The other thing is also on the ground. We have community developers out in neighbourhoods and that's why I mentioned that I think there's more to be done with multi-lingual approaches and more direct communication with more diverse populations, because we are seeing that not all of the messaging is coming through and making sense to everybody.

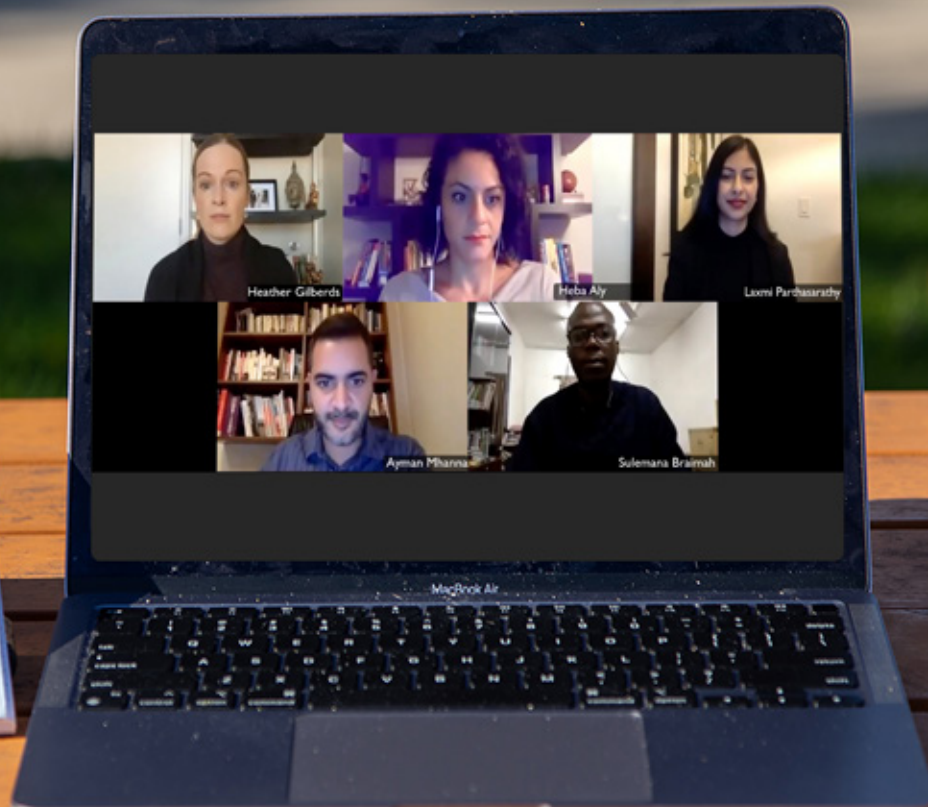
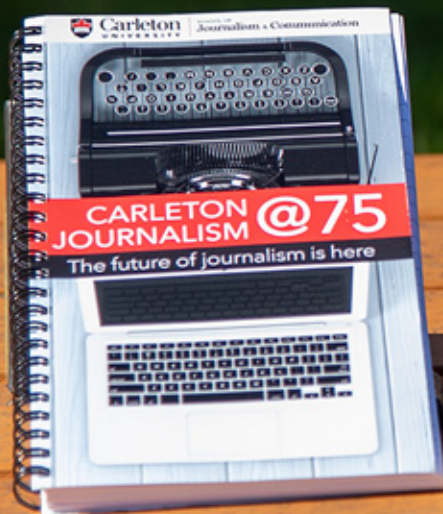
Scott Mitchell: We have another question here. If most media consumers want news for free, how do they imagine a consequent media ecosystem collapse and how will it ultimately impact their lives? Admittedly, a difficult question to answer in the span of the three minutes we have left.

Chris Waddell: Okay, I'll answer that in about an hour and a half. Most people have no idea where news comes from and have no idea how much news costs. They see it around them. They think it's always going to be there. They don't realize that news organizations may go out of business. April Lindgren at Ryerson has been doing a lot of work with other people on what gets called news deserts, which are in Canada and also in other countries, where local news outlets are shutting down.

On Jsource.ca. you can find lots of maps showing all that. It's a little bit like Joni Mitchell, that you don't know what you've got till it's gone, and I'm afraid people are going to discover that that's true. There's an interesting story in *The New York Times* this week, that's worth looking at about. It appears to be conservative interests moving into communities where media has collapsed and creating quasi media that looks like media, but it's actually public relations or promotions for certain interests.

Part of the big challenge is the public, and frankly, even in Canada, some of the issue is that the public broadcaster gives it away for free. And as long as the public broadcaster gives it away for free that's another issue against private broadcasters as well, and I suppose against the private media community too. This is probably an issue that needs to be sorted out by the government in terms of determining what it thinks its role for the public broadcasters should be. However, the public doesn't really know, as our survey demonstrated, they don't understand there's a problem and they have no idea where news comes from, or they have no idea what it costs to gather.

Scott Mitchell: Thank you, Chris. I'd like to thank our panellists once again for their presentations and for participating in this discussion.



JOURNALISM IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

JOURNALISM, THE PANDEMIC AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH

PANEL

Moderator: Heather Gilberts, Centre for International Media Assistance

Speakers: Heba Aly, *The New Humanitarian*; Sulemana Braimah, Media Foundation for West Africa;
Ayman Mhanna, Samir Kassir Foundation; Laxmi Parthasarathy, Global Press

Heather Gilberds: Hello everyone, my name is Heather Gilberds and I would like to welcome you to Journalism, the Pandemic and the Global South. I am the Associate Director of the Centre for International Media Assistance, which is organizing this panel. I'm also a Carleton alumni and I had the privilege to work with Allan Thompson for several years on media development in Sub-Saharan Africa, so I am thrilled to be a part of this event. The Centre for International Media Assistance is a research and knowledge platform based in Washington, DC, within the National Endowment for Democracy. We are dedicated to improving efforts to support independent media as a core institution of democracy in developing and democratizing countries. And we advanced this mission by producing high quality research, convening working groups among stakeholders in the media development community, and hosting events and dialogues.

We have an excellent panel of speakers here today to talk about the impact of COVID-19 on independent journalism in countries in the Global South. The pandemic is negatively affecting independent media organizations and journalists in countries around the world. A growing array of data suggests that many independent news media will not survive the crisis, with some calling it an extinction event. In countries in the Global South where weak media markets and less than free media environments challenge independent media at the best of times, the pandemic is having a devastating effect. Authoritarians are using the crisis to crack down on opposition and dissent, and to spread disinformation and discord in society. The loss of advertising revenue means that many news organizations are struggling to keep the lights on and to keep journalists on the payroll.

Despite this dire picture, demand for high quality, independent news and information is increasing. Citizens demand reliable information to help them stay safe and to hold their governments to account and news organizations are adapting and innovating to meet this demand despite the immense challenges they face. These issues and others will be explored by our panellists. The panel will follow a round-table format where each speaker will respond to a series of questions that I will pose about the impact of COVID-19 on independent journalism and several regions of the Global South. After the round table is complete, we will have 20 to 30 minutes for comments and questions from the audience, and we will use both the hand raise and Q & A chat functions to take questions. We encourage audience members to post about the discussion on social media and please use the #mediadev.

So, without further delay, I'm delighted to introduce the panellists who will discuss these important and often underrepresented issues. Heba Aly is the director of *The New Humanitarian*, an independent non-profit news organization that specializes in covering crises and disasters. Ayman Mhanna is executive director of the Samir Kassir Foundation, a Beirut-based non-profit organization dedicated to protecting freedom of expression. Sulemana Braimah is executive director of the Media Foundation for West Africa, a media development organization based in Ghana that works throughout the West African region and Laxmi Parthasarathy is chief operating officer of Global Press, an international media organization that has independent news bureaus in the world's least covered places.

So now I'd like to turn to each panellist to give a brief introduction. Panellists, please introduce the work your organizations do and please also briefly describe the

challenges that you were facing in your efforts to support independent journalism and one unique initiative you are working on to respond to the pandemic. Please try to keep your opening remarks to five to seven minutes, maybe we'll start with you, Heba.

Heba Aly:

Hi everyone. My name is Heba Aly and I am also a Carleton alumni. I think there are a few of us on this call and I'm also a former student of Allan Thompson's, so it's a small world. When I was at Carleton, I was also the president of the Journalists for Human Rights chapter and that all brings back very nice memories. But now I run an independent non-profit newsroom called *The New Humanitarian* formerly, for those who know us, IRIN News. We were part of the United Nations for about 20 years and spun off five years ago to become independent and then we rebranded. Our mission is really to inform more effective and accountable responses to people in need. We have journalists in some 60 countries around the world who cover everything from conflict to disasters, to refugee flows, to epidemics, anything that really threatens people's lives and access to basic services.

Through our journalism, we try to inform decision makers and practitioners in humanitarian responses about the realities on the ground to hopefully contribute to better decision making. We also try to hold the aid sector accountable. We recently just published a major year-long investigation into sexual exploitation by the World Health Organization, among others in the Congo, during the response to the Ebola crisis. And we're able through that investigation to really shift the needle. It made headlines around the world and many aid agencies are actually announced investigations internally into sexual abuse and I think it has reinvigorated a conversation around how the aid sector can do better.

That's just an example of where we try, through our investigative journalism in particular, to provide accountability in a space where not many media are operating. Lastly, we try to raise awareness among wider audiences and play something of a bridging role between this world of crisis and crisis response, and then the wider media environment. We often find that after we've published an article about something that hadn't really been on the radar, we'll find other mainstream media then picking up the mantle. So we are playing that kind of catalyzing role in putting these issues and these parts of the world on the agenda.

Perhaps unlike other newsrooms, we do really focus on the impact of our journalism for us. It's not at all about paid dues and obviously as a grant-funded organization we're much more focused on how our work can change things in the real world and make the world a better place. Our reporting has been pretty successful at prompting debates in parliaments, in changing UN policy, in prompting new aid programs and through partnerships with other media in really putting issues on the global agenda. So that's a bit about us and if you want to check out the kind of stuff we do, I will drop our link into the chat.

In terms of how we've been affected by COVID and what kind of challenges it has posed to us, we were, in many ways, protected from the kind of worst impacts of COVID because of our model. We are largely grant-funded rather than being dependent on advertising and I think many of the media outfits that took a hit financially was because of advertising. So, we've been spared the worst of the effects on that front. Also, our model is really to depend on journalists who are on

the ground rather than parachuting people in, so rather than sending someone from London to Sudan to report on a story, we work with local journalists who are already in the country and that allowed us to largely be able to continue our reporting even after lockdowns began. Also, we're a digital-first newsroom and our team is largely remote. So again, we were very used to being set up for internally working remotely and being able to connect.

I heard nightmare stories about the BBC for instance, and how hard it was for them to switch to working remotely. We were lucky on that front as well, but of course it has added new challenges to what we do. First and foremost, keeping everyone safe, and by that I mean both our own journalists and adding layers of risk assessments before anyone goes anywhere to ensure that we're not going to be putting them at risk, but also the people that we report on. And the last thing we ever wanted was that one of our journalists would be bringing COVID into a refugee camp for instance, or into the kind of Indigenous communities of the Amazon. So, we have been thinking really carefully about how do we ensure that we don't pose a risk as journalists to the people who are already quite vulnerable?

It's also forced us to think about how we tell stories in new ways where we have been confronted by logistical or operational challenges. How else can we get the story out? We have been increasingly relying on readers for instance, to give tips and story ideas where we can't be on the ground and have actually received many more on our investigative platform, many more tips than we used to. We are also thinking about how we tell stories in a way that really enables the people experiencing those stories to tell them for themselves and I'll give you an example in a second.

A couple other challenges I think countering misinformation. Misinformation, as you said Heather, has been such a defining feature of this pandemic and what do you as a media organization do in the face of that? Our efforts have really been tailored at correcting, calling that out when there is misinformation and then making sure that the real reliable fact-based information gets out there, but you're always kind of up against this tide of stuff and making sure that your voice rises above the noise can sometimes be a challenge.

Financially I mentioned we're doing okay so far, but there's a lot of uncertainty about what the future holds, particularly as we've received some funding from governments who are likely to take a big hit to their overseas development assistance budgets. But I think the largest challenge that we've faced is as a news organization that really tries to help amplify the voices of people that are affected by all sorts of crises. COVID really dominated the narrative in such a way that it was nearly impossible to get anything else on the radar. And yes, COVID was and is a terrible, terrible thing for so many people, but in many places where we were reporting, it wasn't the worst thing that they were facing. They were facing violence, they were facing hunger, they had all kinds of pre-existing challenges on top of which then the reactions to COVID made it even worse. In many cases, the lockdowns had even worse consequences for people than the pandemic itself. And how do you get those stories out?

We tried really hard to use the pandemic given how much interest there was in it as a weight into these wider challenges that many of these countries and regions were

facing. I will say, I think that COVID has not only been a set of challenges, it has also presented some opportunities for us. We saw our audience triple in numbers during the pandemic, as people were coming, seeking reliable information about what was happening on the ground, particularly because many of them couldn't go to the ground the way they might have done before. Aid workers and policy makers who were desperate for a better sense of what was really happening, but I think it's also opened, or we hope it has, this window of opportunity to reach people in a way that maybe we couldn't before. Now the whole world has experienced crisis, the whole world understands why crises can be so debilitating and why it's so important to respond to them effectively and that I hope is an opportunity for us to then get wider stories beyond just COVID to audiences.

Heather Gilberts: I'll just have you pause there because we're going to dig into some of these issues in a bit more depth in the round table. Next maybe I'll just turn to Ayman. Ayman if you could give us a brief introduction to the Samir Kassir Foundation and the work that you're doing in Lebanon to support journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ayman Mhanna: Thank you, Heather. I'm very, very happy to be with you. My name is Ayman Mhanna, I'm the director of the Samir Kassir Foundation, which I joined in September 2011. Our foundation is named after a journalist, Samir Kassir, who was assassinated in Beirut in June 2005. The foundation mainly focuses on freedom of expression and media development. Although we're based in Beirut, our activities span across the Middle East and North Africa. We mainly focus on three pillars. The first one is protection and safety of journalists, and it's based on daily monitoring of violations, targeting freedom of expression in general, journalists, in particular media professionals, but also arts and culture in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine. But we also provide personal support through financial, legal means, but also a safe hosting program for journalists persecuted in their countries and this program is open to the entire MENA region.

The second main pillar is advocacy in order to improve the operating framework for journalists, where they're targeting media owners, media managers to improve the culture of in our sector, but also to try to impact legislation or self-regulation. It's not necessarily the most responsive region given the nature of most political regimes, but there are always ways to leverage, sometimes international pressure that can come on a certain topic or the need to look good when people join the big coalitions that are announced at conferences in London, the Hague or virtually, like the one that Canada will be organizing in a few days.

And the third and main component for our work, more related to media development, is based on research on all the major challenges that the media sector faces and COVID is clearly one of them. Knowing how the audience consumes and reacts to all new forums of media experiences is another main topic of our research. Looking into the content that is produced by independent media outlets across the Middle East and North Africa is also another topic that we use to tell the owners, the journalists who work for these independent online initiatives, how they can best respond to their audience, audience's aspirations, interests, and this is happening on a daily basis with a team currently consisting of 22 present in six countries. So, this is us on a daily basis.

Of course, today we are facing several challenges. I will not complain about our current financial situation because of the business model of focusing on being grant funded at the same time as focusing on long-term relationships with many of our partners and donors. But the challenges, I'll divide them into ones that are related to the framework and ones that are directly related to our organization in this context. First, the framework in which we operate. It's a framework where although the word or the term has been used far too often, but we feel it in Lebanon and across the region very clearly that shrinking space for freedom of expression and for civic initiatives and citizen engagement.

In December, it will be 10 years since Bouaziz in Tunisia set himself on fire to protest oppression, repression and corruption, and what was called the Arab Spring erupted. Since it now looks as if it took place many decades ago, because there was a counter movement coming from two sides, political Islam on the one hand and the military regimes and the strong men policy on the other hand, which both led to that shrinking space. And the kind of instability that followed 2010, 2011, 2012, was met by a kind of luke-warm reaction from most international partners who send the signals, whether it's true or not, that they do prefer stability at any price.

That they are okay with strong men in the region ignoring basic human rights principles as long as there are good conferences in the Hague, in Canada, in London that pretend to be supporting press freedom, that's fine. But the arms deals and the security cooperation and the countering terrorism cooperation is taking place and it's understood by the rulers in our region as a blank cheque to do whatever they want, as long as things are stable and as long as they advance political relations with other players in the region.

The other major challenge in our region is that I think that rulers and authorities are making excellent use of technology that is provided under the pretext of supporting security sector reform and combatting terrorism, but very often used to restrict freedom of expression. As long as the big tech platforms do not also change the way their algorithmic policies force us to remain in our bubbles, things will not necessarily change. And this operating environment is difficult for us, and I'll finish with our direct challenges in the country of Lebanon where our foundation is located, which has been going through one of the worst economic and financial crisis ever. Our currency and our purchasing power have lost 80 percent of their values since the beginning of the year right before COVID. Then also during COVID, leading to the tragic explosion in the port of Beirut on August 4th, which destroyed any hope that's left because the government is officially bankrupt. Our government defaulted on its debt back in March so it's not even able to help anyone, whether media sector or individual or business.

In this context, being grant funded in foreign currency means that we have an artificially elevated power today as a foundation, but that is not truly reflective of the true situation on the ground, because it means it is very difficult to maintain staff. Staff retention is a real problem because of the lack of stability, lack of perspective in the country. We have another main challenge in this situation, which is our inability to report to our donors when it comes to how much money we're spending, because the currency as officially recognized by the government and the banks, has nothing to do with the one that is operating on the real market or on the black market or on the bank market.

This is a daily challenge that forces us to have to find daily solutions, which also means that we have to increase the number of projects in order to respond to all the urgent needs because of the current situation, while trying to maintain the same level of human resources and overhead. Instead of having to work with three or four projects in order to cater to all our needs, we have to deliver on 16 or 17 different grants at the same time to ensure the same level of overhead and work, which puts a daily pressure on all of us.

Finally, in this context, COVID-19 and the other issues, especially the Beirut explosion in August, we've launched a media recovery fund with a very strong signal for the first time ever. We did not write a proposal, we just sent an email to all our international partners telling them this has been a tragic event and journalists were effected. Today, journalists need medical assistance because their insurance policies don't apply anymore given the economic collapse. They need psycho-social and therapy assistance, they need to replace their computers. Today, the cost of a basic Mac, the cheapest one is \$1,200, if we look at it from a bank dollar perspective, it costs around \$12,000 or \$8,000. We need to be here for them because we cannot import them anymore as a country, whereas we as a foundation, foreign-funded foundation we are able to do it.

We need to replace their equipment, we need to repair their offices and also we need to provide them with economic livelihood support, alongside support for investigative work so they can play their role, because journalists not playing their role means we are awaiting the next tragedy, the next explosion and we are all alive waiting for the next tragedy that will kill many people. Journalists have a role to play today in spite of the crisis and we need your support to do that. Within one month, we managed to raise \$829,000 and the National Endowment for Democracy was one of our main supporters. Thank you.

Heather Gilberts: Thank you, Ayman I think the multiple intersecting crises occurring in Lebanon just show again, the precarious circumstance in which many independent journalists work. Thank you for that background. Next, I'd like to turn to Sulemana. Would you give us a little bit of a background on the Media Foundation for West Africa and the work that you're doing with journalists during the COVID 19 pandemic?

Sulemana Braimah: Thank you very much. It's great to be part of this conversation from Accra in Ghana. The Media Foundation for West Africa was established in 1997 at a time when a lot of the countries in the region were transitioning from a military dictatorship to democratic and constitutional rules. And that meant that we were transitioning from an environment where governments had media monopolies, perhaps one state broadcaster, a few newspapers that were government controlled to an environment that's a short media liberalization, opening up of the media space.

Again, we're dealing with governments that just one or two years ago were wearing military uniforms as heads of states and within just a year or two, put out the military uniforms and become civilian heads of states. In terms of uniforms, they may be different, but in terms of attitudes and character towards press freedom, freedom of expression, it was the same.

The foundation was set up to accompany the process and to help open up the space for freedom of expression, media freedom. We work across the 16 countries in West Africa, the ECOWAS region has 15 countries, and then geographically Mauritania is part of West Africa. On a day-to-day basis, what we do is similar to Ayman's in a month's work.

We do monitor the environment together with our national partners in all the 16 countries, basically tracking, documenting and where issues emerge advocating for redress. That is under our Freedom of Expression program. Over the last five years, we have had to have a big focus on digital rights because increasingly the internet space is becoming the biggest platform for self-expression. So, the traditional media role of being the gatekeepers and being the ones who determine whose voices are heard is gradually waning.

Having citizens being able to use social media platforms and other platforms to express themselves is part of what helped to boost the democratic environment. But again, we saw an unimagined attitude of governments deciding to either infringe on the rights of citizens within the digital realm, using network shutdowns during critical moments of national events or privacy violations or even adopting practices that inhibit the extent to which citizens can use the internet for expression. So digital rights became part of our portfolio within the freedom of expression work.

The second strand of our work revolves around what we call media and good governance. It is basically about how do we empower the media to do the work that we say press freedom is important. And so it responds to the question, why are you defending journalists? Why are you saying press freedom is important? Why are you saying digital rights are important?

We try to build the capacity of the media to be able to respond to that question by way of professionally doing their work, holding governments accountable, holding duty bearers accountable, and at the same time, providing a voice, particularly on radio to those people who cannot read and write. And those who are usually in the remote areas who tend to also be the most vulnerable and the ones whose voices are least heard in the public discourse.

Empowering radio stations, newspaper organizations, news websites and so on is part of the core work that we do. And a part of that work is also what we call media and citizens engagement, providing the platforms that enable citizens to engage with authorities directly. In many of the countries where we work we've developed platforms, that is, if it's a district assembly, we call it a time with a district assembly. If it is a regional or a municipality, we call it time with the municipal authority.

Of course, in many of these places too, we've had that arrangement with city authorities so that every quarter they address their citizens, either through radio or local television on the state of their communities and what they are doing, what they are using, the resources, the taxes, and so on.

Apart from that, we also work directly with investigative journalists through micro grants that we provide to them because we are in a region where journalists may be committed to do their work, they have the fantastic ideas, they have the sources, they have all that they need to do, but the little resources they need to be able to

move about to research, to gather data, to buy data for internet research becomes a problem. So quite often we provide micro grants to journalists to be able to do investigative work.

And the last piece of our work focuses on what we call institutional development. Basically, how do we strengthen ourselves as an organization while we do these pieces of work around the region? And it doesn't end with just us as a media foundation, but also the national partner organizations that we work with because the stronger they are, the stronger collectively we would be in terms of delivering our mandate.

We have a dedicated portfolio of work that is focused on institutional development. We are strengthening ourselves and by extension also strengthening our national partners in the various countries. Generally, this is the work we do. We work here in Accra with a team of 22, and we have other colleagues who are based in six countries.

Together we are about 28 people. And for each of these 16 countries, we have individuals that we've recruited and worked with year-round, who are underground monitors. The violations that are happening, the policy documents that are emerging, the restrictive laws that are coming up, these are the folks who alert us, so we call them the FOE monitors, the freedom of expression monitors.

In terms of COVID, a number of issues in terms of the impact on the media, the situation is not too different from what may have been experienced elsewhere across the world, except that in our case, it's perhaps much more severe. If you take a country like Guinea, where at the beginning of the year there were 20 registered newspapers with a regulator, by June due to COVID only nine of those were operational.

If you go to Mauritania for example, where five private radio stations existed, now there's only one that remains on air. And even that, they've cut back considerably on programming. You go to Nigeria where *The Nation Newspaper* for example, in the middle of June, laid off 100 of its reporters. And it is not just in Nigeria where those layoffs occurred. Even in Guinea, one newspaper had to lay off all staff except the secretary. So, it was just the publisher and the secretary left.

In terms of revenues, of course, that is why a lot of media organizations had to lay off their staff. As Heather was saying, we also do have the experience where digital platforms had massive increases in readership, except that it didn't affect the bottom line. And that is because yes, we all appreciate here in the region the point about digitization being the future, go digital go, digital; people had tried to go digital, but it was merely digitization without monetization.

Yes, you have a lot of people coming online to your platform, but no mechanisms have been put in place to ensure that you're either getting revenue through memberships or through subscription or through other models. It was holistic reliance on advertising. And here we are where advertising revenues have died down, companies were not interested in advertising around content that relates to COVID. As I said, huge readership increases, but no impact on the bottom line.

Heather Gilberts: We're going to dig into these issues in a bit more depth. I'm going to quickly turn to Laxmi to give an introduction to Global Press, and then we'll return to these issues, but thank you very much for that background. And don't worry, we'll come back to these very important topics.

Laxmi Parthasarathy: Thanks Heather and thanks for having me on the panel. I think there's so much to dig into with my fellow panellists, but I did want to just say, it's really exciting to be part of this panel. It's Allan Thompson's conference, so that's exciting. And I do have to say it was really the Rwanda Initiative that Allan Thompson was leading that truly sparked my interest in needed development to begin with. So thanks for that, Allan. And since then, I've been fortunate to work in the field of media development for over a decade.

Today I'm chief operating officer of Global Press, which is an international media organization that trains and employs local reporters to produce exceptional journalism in under-covered media markets. We operate 40 independent news bureaus from Kirumba in the Democratic Republic of Congo to Jaffna in Sri Lanka. Global Press was founded 15 years ago by Christi Grandness to offer a counterpoint to the disaster-driven narrative that the 24-hour news cycle often prioritizes in international journalism coverage.

We produce comprehensive coverage from complex places using traditional journalistic values. And in order to do this, all of our reporters are essentially hired by Global Press. We train them in a four-month training program at Global Press Institute where they learn everything from photojournalism to fact checking, regardless of whether they've had previous journalism experience. Once they graduate, they are offered exceptional employment, not freelance assignments that Global Press Journal offers and this is our award-winning news platform.

Our network of professional local reporters are employed within a robust editorial structure to produce integrity-rich, accurate journalism that features local sources and deep context, as well as nuanced analysis on topics that are rarely covered elsewhere. One of my personal favourite things about Global Press Journal is that we publish all of our news stories in English and the reporters' local languages through a really robust network called Global Press Accuracy Network, which is our network of translators and interpreters, fact-checkers and copy editors.

For the last 15 years, Global Press has employed 250 female reporters. We've produced over 10,000 pieces of exceptional journalism, and we continue to operate one of the most diverse newsrooms in the world. One of the challenges in our field is building truly representative journalism, as well as providing exceptional employment opportunities.

When we launch a news bureau, we make a long-term commitment to the coverage of a country. Take, for example, our news bureau in Chiapas, Mexico. We've been operating there for nearly 14 years and 70 percent of Global Press Journal reporters stay with us for at least five years, while others like our reporter, Marissa Re Villa has been reporting with us in Chiapas, Mexico, since the very beginning.

I really want to emphasize this idea of great journalism begins with great journalism jobs. And exceptional employment is something that we're really proud to offer. I've

been in the media industry, in the media development industry specifically for a long time, and I know how common it is for reporters to receive training, but then re-enter newsrooms where editorial policies and all the great best practices that they learned aren't actually continued to be upheld or enforced in any way.

They're also often met with challenges such as not making even a minimum wage in some of the countries where they report from. At Global Press, we really take a systems-change approach to international journalism from recruitment to training, to employment and of course, our editorial approach as well. And you can read all of our new stories on globalpressjournal.com, as well as engage with our products and services on globalpressnewsservices.com.

Related specifically to the pandemic, a lot of the things that Heather was talking about ring very similar to Global Press. One of the unique programs that we operate at Global Press is our Duty of Care program. This is our holistic safety and security program designed to meet the specific needs of local journalists who live in the communities that they cover. This is when, for example, for our reporters, extraction is simply not an option.

They are local journalists who live in the communities that they cover. So, they require a robust and inclusive security methodology that prioritizes the interconnectedness of four important things: physical, emotional, digital, and legal security. As we've all experienced in 2020, it's brought major disruptions to many organizations around the world, but similar to what Heather was discussing, we've really been fortunate to be prepared for this crisis thanks to our Duty of Care program.

It's really prepared us for many imminent threats that our reporters face, and we've kept over 40 news bureaus safe while managing to cover the consequences of the coronavirus in communities. In a fast-moving crisis such as this, our first priority is to ensure that our global team of reporters are safe, as well as the communities and the sources that they are working with are also kept safe. We've learned that doing so really requires us to assemble as much information about their local context as possible.

We can piece together some of that information remotely, but our reporters themselves are our most valuable assets when it comes to understanding their local context. To take advantage of their local insight, what we've done is built a constant culture of two-way communication. Before coronavirus, that system has helped us meticulously track their safety during reporting when they're on assignment and now we're leveraging it for the pandemic.

Just a quick example, in the state of Acacha in Mexico, we rely on our reporters' feedback to piece together a granular and real-time picture of the state's heterogeneous lockdown conditions. Our reporters tell us that some of the communities are entirely closed off with chains and fences. Others are much more lenient and allow some traffic to come through for essential supplies.

The point of this being that realities on the ground can differ substantially from the government's state-wide guidance or protocols that are being issued. By listening to our reporters, we can tailor their reporting work plans, including which communities they can and can't enter and essentially help them report safely. I'm looking forward

to really discussing some of these challenges and some of the learnings we've had over the last few months covering the consequences of the coronavirus around the world.

Heather Gilberts: Thank you Laxmi. Now, I'd like to move into a round table where I'll ask a series of questions for the panellists to answer, and please any of the panellists can jump in with your responses to these questions. Please also give specific examples from your context.

The first kind of set of questions I'd like to dig into in a bit more depth is one thing that you all touched on, that is, the importance of verified, trustworthy information during a crisis. In many crises, we see that demand for independent trustworthy information increases and, in some cases, it is a matter of life and death. Could you share your experience about the increased demand for quality independent media in your context?

Heba Aly: You go ahead Laxmi.

Laxmi Parthasarathy: There are so many examples to share here. When I think about trustworthy journalism, beyond the context that we're in right now, the importance of local reporting and the presence of local reporters versus having a foreign correspondent helicopter into a community, this is such a unique moment and fascinating moment to watch, when frankly, foreign correspondents have been grounded and we're really reliant on those that we have been calling fixers and researchers and everything other than the reporter with the byline that we should respect and trust.

It's really underscored the importance of reporting with a local lens during COVID-19 and we've all read those stories that have a dateline in Johannesburg while the reporting actually takes place in a remote area of Uganda. As foreign correspondents were grounded during this time, we've seen a significant increase in our audience numbers. So, there's clearly an interest in what's happening in these places.

As an industry, we finally get to see local reporters stepping into these roles and truly that is going to give you much more nuanced analysis. It's going to give you access to the people that are dealing with the crisis. And we've seen that from our coverage, whether it's vulnerable populations such as sex workers in Kampala, Uganda, or we did an amazing story on epidemiologists fighting the virus in Arkhangelsk Province, Mongolia. Our reporters are just capturing incredible moments during this pandemic. Again, really only local reporters can do. And I think that local reporting does inherently lead to trustworthy journalism.

Heba Aly: And just to add to that and speak a little bit to what Sulemana was saying before, that in some contexts, what we have found is readers are coming to us because they don't trust their governments on the narrative around coronavirus. For instance, we published a piece out of Tanzania around how Tanzanian doctors were sounding the alarm about the number of cases that was well beyond what the government was admitting to.

We've seen that in different places, in Yemen and elsewhere, where citizens no longer trust what they're hearing from governments and they're depending on independent media to be able to fill that gap, sometimes at the local level, the

media are captured there on one level or the other. We have what is sometimes an advantage and sometimes a disadvantage of being an external kind of international media that has no ties to the local context, except for, of course, the journalists that we work with, but that has also brought a certain credibility that we don't have a stake in the game and that we're only there to really provide information and absolutely it can be lifesaving.

Our work is crisis, so almost everything we cover is life and death, but fake news about what constitutes a cure to coronavirus, it can be deadly. I think having the trust of readers that we have their interests at heart has changed. It's funny, because before the Corona virus and for the last few years, the media had lost so much trust from readers. And you saw that in the Edelman Trust surveys, a retreat from media and much more toward peer to peer sharing of information. And somehow this crisis has kind of reminded people of just what role the media can and must play in these kinds of situations.

Ayman Mhanna:

What we found very interesting, given all the conversions of all the crisis we have been going through from COVID to the economic crisis to political unrest, is that despite the crisis, or maybe thanks to the crisis, people have become more nuanced in their media consumption patterns. Of course, media that is completely captured by the political actors is being rejected increasingly, especially by the younger population.

We first see a growing generational gap. The second major element we see is that the relatively younger people and older people who are trying to see quality information have diversified their media sources. They need the relatively big media organizations that are very good on sending notifications through push notifications on their phone, just to get quick lines about current events — so-and-so was appointed prime minister a few hours ago, or for example, there is a road that is blocked in that area. For this kind of fast consumption of basic news, the relatively bigger platform, more traditional, but kind of independent, are quite strong, but when it comes to truly reflecting people's stories and focusing on things that happen and affect people's lives, this is where the reliance on new innovative ways of telling stories is growing with a very strong focus on local journalists. There are plenty of platforms that are now developing a citizen-based network of sources. I'm not talking about citizen journalism, but young people who are really working as very good reporters on the ground in remote areas bringing something new, while at the same time, a very strong reliance on international, the big international platforms, I'm specifically thinking about the independence when it comes to in-depth investigative stories that local media outlets don't have the resources to undertake.

This kind of alliance that sometimes happens in a cooperative way between big international platforms, in particular, with support from OCCRP and others, when it comes to issues really difficult to address like the Beirut port explosion in partnership with a local media outlet. While also relying on some of these new social media-based useful platform who know how to translate 20,000 words, a big report into a series of five, very smart slides on Instagram. It's this kind of very diversified media consumption pattern that emerged during late last year in Lebanon. And that can also serve as a very interesting example for other countries.

Heather Gilberts: It's very interesting how during a crisis, the reaffirmation of local news and its importance comes to the forefront as well as the role of adaptation and innovation. Within all of these constraints and challenges that journalists are facing, they are finding ways to adapt and innovate. Those are really important points. Do you have anything to add on Sulemana on the increased demand for independent information during the coronavirus crisis?

Sulemana Braimah Yes. In our region this year alone, we have close to six or seven countries up for elections. We had a pandemic in a year that countries have the worst scandals for elections. If you take Ghana, for example, the first time, two cases were reported. There were debates within the political space, whether it is true, it's not true. Or a government is trying to manipulate the system or try to use this to spend money for political campaigning. And we had the opposition create his own "COVID management team." The government had a COVID management team. And so there was a crisis of who to believe and who to rely on for information. And then of course, within a matter of months, there was lockdown. People were at home, no opportunities to interact with others to learn about what is happening.

Then people could only rely on media. One group is stating that the opposition says the government is saying that the health experts are saying this, and then there is the whole thing about the conspiracy theories. They said because of our temperatures in West Africa, no, COVID cannot do anything. Eventually, cases are reported, or they say, well, how about treatment that is effective? And then Madagascar comes up with a COVID organic for that country, nothing like wearing a mask and so on. In Tanzania, the president says, "well, we are free of it, there's nothing." So, it raised a lot of expectations on the part of people not knowing what to believe. For example, we immediately got a grant of close to \$400,000 to work with traditional media organizations, particularly radio.

We put together a network of 50 radio stations across the country in Ghana, and then set up a fact-checking team immediately. And what was happening was all the information that was on social media, Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp especially, were immediately verified. And then once it is authenticated, it is pushed out to their media partners, 50 radio stations across the country for their bulletins, for their programming. Ultimately, that is how we were able to mitigate the situation here in Ghana. In Nigeria, similar things were done in terms of media organizations, partnering with fact-checking networks, to be able to authenticate, verify, and make sure that people are getting authentic information. It's something that really heightened people's expectations of not just news, but what to believe and why should we tend to for the facts.

Heather Gilberts: Thank you. We've talked quite a lot about sort of the declines in revenues and how that is posing challenges for independent media organizations. We've talked a little bit about the problem of disinformation and misinformation and in particular, how journalists are dealing with that. One other issue I'd like to talk about is in many countries, governments are using the crisis as an excuse to crack down on opposition and dissenting voices. So through states of emergency, they're restricting the activities of journalists as a way to quash dissent. I'd like to see if you have any examples from your contexts where the governments are restricting the space for journalists to do their work during the pandemic.

Laxmi Parthasarathy: This kind of overt censorship during a crisis is certainly a challenge, but there's also invisible censorship that we have to discuss during times of crisis. If we think about, in our example in Zimbabwe, I remember when it was announced that reporters could be considered essential services. You had all of the official communication going out saying totally fine for reporters to be out reporting it's safe they just have to carry their 2020 press passes. 2020 press passes weren't issued in Zimbabwe so there was a lot of confusion about an intentional confusion around whether or not reporters can be safely out reporting. It actually led to multiple arrests cases of harassment for reporters that were still carrying 2019 press passes. It's these situations where, as an organization, we really have to carefully navigate with the reporter, how to overcome this miscommunication from governments.

We've also seen that, for example, in Jaffna, Sri Lanka, where we have a news bureau, they have a really hard time accessing official documents and official records in Tamil. The language that's primarily spoken in the north is Tamil. Whereas the government-issued documents are often in English and in Sinhala. They're supposed to be making these documents available in Tamil, but often in practice isn't the case. It just makes sourcing balanced stories, extremely challenging. During the lockdown situation we had, it was within several hours where a lockdown was taking place in Jaffna province, and the actual messaging wouldn't have gotten to Jaffna province in the local language without our research teams and translation teams getting those memos out immediately. So reporters can get their tech charged up, get what they need in order to continue safely reporting from home in their communities. Of course, there is overt censorship, but then there are all sorts of issues that we have to navigate when it comes to this influence that governments have, especially in communicating in very confusing ways during a moment of crisis that can be taken advantage of.

Heather Gilberts: Other comments about the tendency for during a crisis for governments and less than free media environment to crack down on independent journalism?

Ayman Mhanna: Under the pretext of fighting fake news and fighting this information, governments have used these excuses to further crack down. We all know what happened to our friends in Egypt and other places this is just one example, and I'm sure our colleagues will give you more examples. I would like to warn about a risk that we are not today categorizing on censorship, but that is also growing under COVID because we need to trace to understand where infected people have been going. The massive use of surveillance technology of data mining, data gathering in countries where the infrastructure for data protection, data safety, data security is very weak, is a recipe for disaster. We understand why right now there is an emergency to really know how many people live in each household and all their needs, their sources of income and so on.

We can justify this with the need to restrict COVID, but that technology is now available and can be used against people for the wrong reasons later, and at the same time, we don't know if that data can be manipulated for political reasons. We don't have access to information. Journalists don't have access to information to check and audit whether this data gathering is being done, respecting some minimal centres. We are creating plenty of ingredients for, unfortunately, I'm Lebanese, I always talk about explosions, for yet another explosive mix soon that

is not about direct censorship, but about a very new form of intrusion into people's freedom of opinion.

Heather Gilberts: Thank you Aman. Sulemana, Hebar, additional comments?

Sulemana Braimah: I think this was one of the major issues in the region in terms of how governments were using the COVID situation to repress journalistic methods. If you take Nigeria, for example, there was one time where 12 journalists were detained at a secretariat of Adamawa State, where they often would get out to discuss the day's work and how things are going. And on one occasion, the state authorities just went into the press centre, detained all 12 journalists, arrested them, took them to the police station. And the charge was that they had breached the lockdown rules, and the journalists' position was, well, we are journalists we are working. We are supposed to let the people know what is happening. If you take Liberia, for example, again there was a time when three journalists were arrested and the point was that they had breached curfew hours and the journalists were explaining, well, we are journalists, here are our passes. And the authorities said, no, you could only work with passes that are being issued by the government. And the Liberian Union of Journalist says, no, for years we have been the body that issues the passes to journalists to work. And so long as they possess passes of the press union, they are supposed to be allowed to work as journalists.

In many other countries, government then assumed the role of being the one to determine what to report and what not to report. There were instances in Nigeria where journalists were arrested and that was because they had reported on issues contrary to information that had been put out by the government. In the cases where the government was putting out false information, journalists who dared correct or report to the contrary, many of them were arrested. Even in Ghana, the government revived a law that was dormant in terms of the publication of false news. In Côte d'Ivoire a journalist was fined \$8,500 for this. The charge was he had published what the government deemed to be fake news. The harassment, the arrest, the intimidation was in every country, not just in countries such as Ghana, where you would say, press freedom is very much respected. That's really one of the critical things in terms of how governments can use situations like this to demonstrate their true intentions when it comes to press freedom.

Laxmi Parthasarathy: I would just add to what Sulemana is sharing. It reminds me of this incredible piece that Linda Mujuru, one of our senior reporters was able to cover. Zimbabwe tried to have constitutional hearings during the pandemic and put through quick changes in favour of the current regime. Linda was still able to cover that piece during a pandemic and during these constitutional hearings that were all closed doors. Certainly there are major challenges to not just covering the pandemic, but also, using this as an opportunity to push through new laws and changes to a constitution.

Heba Aly: I was just going to add the same. We have been lucky not to have our journalists caught up in some of these crackdowns, but certainly we have had to do a lot of reporting around how governments are using COVID as an excuse to crackdown on in other areas. And migration is a huge example where governments were using COVID as an excuse to introduce really hard-line migration and anti-immigrant

policies. We then have a huge responsibility as journalists to call that out and to not let that just get pushed under the carpet.

Heather Gilberts: Those were wonderfully illustrative examples. Thank you to all of you. I have a few other questions, but I would like to give the audience a chance to ask questions to each of the panellists.

We have a couple of questions and one is a follow-up from a previous question about how these projects that you've discussed will be moving forward. Also what other lessons have been learned from the state of journalism in this crisis. Do you think we will actually outlive this crisis and be put to use on a long-term basis? Another question is do you think we'll go back to more parachute journalism post-COVID once correspondents can move around again, more freely or have we seen a permanent shift? In some ways these two questions are all about how much of the changes and the responses that we've seen now will be permanent or you're to think they're kind of more temporary.

Anyone can jump in and answer.

Heba Aly: I'll have a go. I think the status quo is a really powerful beast. This is a wider statement than just journalism, but for all the optimism, I suppose that this crisis was going to open up a new way of living and more sustainable communities and all kinds of changes in the way our societies function, I am not as optimistic that this will last. I think, however, being aware that change comes with financial savings, you might have an opportunity for a longer lasting effect. Frankly, it's much more efficient financially to work with local journalists who are already on the ground than to be sending people in. If newsrooms have gotten used to doing that now, why would they go back to a much more expensive model as well as a model that tends not to always turn up good stories?

I think even just for self-interested reasons, even if they aren't the motivations that we might kind of sympathize with, some of these changes will last because the financial environment is going to be so difficult and there will be no other choice. On collaborations, I think that will last too. Collaborations within media predated COVID and it started with the Panama Papers, for example, where suddenly media organizations understood the power of working together and how much more they could not only have impact with their journalism, but actually benefit institutionally from the visibility that comes with these kinds of bigger projects. So, I think we certainly have been really open-minded about collaboration before COVID, but even more so after COVID. We know now that many media houses in Africa for instance, as Sulemana was mentioning, are in very troubled waters. We're all in troubled water. We don't have to compete anymore; we need each other. I think as that model gets forced upon us and we see the positive fruits from it, then parts of that will last.

Laxmi Parthasarathy: I couldn't agree more Heba, whether it's for the right reasons or not. It's my hope that we've tested a new model during a time of crisis. And that testing hopefully is going to lead to long-term strategies for implementing this as the new normal. One of the things that I think is going to be very important moving forward are partnerships between local and global news organizations. COVID has really shown us that all local stories are actually global stories. We're all very much connected,

and there's a lot to learn about how other countries and communities have been responding to the pandemic and managing communications during this crisis. I think the world would greatly benefit by having more diverse voices, of course, given all of our work in the global media and sharing stories and solutions. Part of this is of course reimagining what international journalism should look like and can look like. And to the question that was posed by our participant, it truly is my hope that this is the new normal and that the future of international journalism is actually based solely within local reporters.

Heather Gilberts: Aman, you talked quite a lot about how the different crises accelerate the pace of innovation within the news media sector. Do you think some of those changes will be long lasting?

Ayman Mhanna: Innovation when it comes to storytelling, absolutely. Innovation in terms of breaking silos that exist on different platforms will continue because it's more responsive to people's direct concerns. It gives people a wider diversity, a wider menu to choose from. So, this would definitely go in the right direction, but at the same time, I would like to remain cautious about the viability, if not met with equal innovation at the level of the business models and the revenue streams. Yes, we and others are trying to help media organizations think creatively about it, but the pace of innovation when it comes to storytelling and creativity, when it comes to cooperation is, unfortunately, much faster than the pace of innovation when it comes to a business model, especially in times of economic crisis. Today we are exploring ways of creating a new approach to advertising.

If you look at independent media outlets, for example, in the MENA region, trying to cooperate on a new way of approaching advertising requires conversations with the tech platforms that people need to be equipped to have in terms of training, literacy, even bargaining and negotiation. Is it where we want to go? This is probably one of the first things that's being explored. What about working more on cooperating with international outlets by focusing on local needs? Can this cover some of the economic costs? So today there is a good time for a lot of discussions about how to meet the content innovation with economic innovation.

Heba Aly: Can I just add to that Heather, because I think there's a link between a more locally rooted journalism of the future and business models. I might make a bit of a jump here, but if we do get to the stage where you have local people telling their own stories to their own communities and really providing a service to a very specific group of people through their journalism. Those people are much more likely to be willing to pay for it. And the whole concept of audience engagement, the rise of membership models to fund journalism I think will be facilitated by more locally owned journalism that is speaking to a very specific community. While I agree that there is reason to be pessimistic and cautious, we've just launched a membership drive this year and COVID has, I think, been an accelerator in people's willingness to pay for the journalism that they trust and need and want to consume. So, there is that silver lining, I believe, if journalism can truly prove that it is providing a public service, that it is helping communities make sense of the world around them, that it is representative of those communities, and that does open up some revenue streams as well.

Laxmi Parthasarathy: I can add as well, in terms of the business model, a plug for an organization called Hearken. They are doing a lot of interesting work with newsrooms around the world on how audience engagement can actually lead to dollars. This idea that Heba was talking about, that if you're being represented in the news that you are reading, and you truly feel like it's adding value to your life, you're more likely to purchase and consume it. But beyond that, in terms of new business models, what we've been experimenting with is we just relaunched something called globalpressnewsservices.com. This is our products and services division within Global Press, and what we do is offer select clients access to more than a dozen products and services such as the *Global Press Journal Style Guide*, our local journalists security training and tools.

We've been operating in some of the most complex places in the world for more than a decade now. We've realized that there are tons of tools inside of our newsroom and in our organization that we're using every single day that are extremely valuable to other organizations. For example, recently we did a workshop with the Poynter Institute on anti-racist word use. This whole idea of our style guide essentially deviating from that of the Associated Press, that we all just rely on, is important. And it's something that a lot of organizations, not just news organizations, can be trained to use. We've also done style guide training for the International Development Finance Corporation. We don't take any government dollars, but we certainly are happy to help train the government in appropriate word use. There are just tons of tools inside of newsrooms that journalists have, particularly local journalists, that can really be interesting for other organizations.

Heather Gilberts: Thank you for that. I have a question. We have talked a lot about the overlapping challenges with a crisis like COVID, as well as other crises present for independent media: financial, censorship, misinformation and conspiracy theories that journalists must navigate. How can organizations help? I think we have two organizations represented here that are supporting journalists at regional levels, the Media Foundation for West Africa and the Samir Kassir Foundation. And we have two that are supporting journalists at a global level. You're all uniquely well positioned to tell us, what do journalists need the most to do their work during these times and how should they be supported?

Heba Aly: I was at a freedom of the press conference last summer. Traditionally, all of the talk, when you talk about how do you support freedom of the press and journalism, is around the political space to be able to speak openly, such as censorship, were discussed. I think what's encouraging for me is that that's starting to shift toward an understanding that you can't have a free media if the media can't afford to survive. If you want to support proper independent journalism in some of the parts of the world that need it the most, you need to support it financially and allow this kind of journalism to exist.

I often say we see education or health care as a public good, and yet we don't see information and journalism as a public good, even when we have seen the impacts of this information, ie, people's lives at stake. Even when we have seen how journalism can protect democracy and be such a fundamental pillar of a free society. We do, unlike Laxmi, accept government funding. It comes from government aid departments who use our journalism to inform how they can help people around the world. And we have firewalls in place, in the way newsrooms do with advertisers or any other kind of funding.

I do think that governments who have long supported public broadcasters and other kinds of media have an important role to play in supporting a healthy and thriving media industry, which isn't always possible in certain contexts where government support for media will never allow it to be free. And we do need to be, all of us, thinking about what our role is as readers to be supporting this work financially. Philanthropy should be playing a much bigger role, I believe, in recognizing media as a destination for charitable giving and that everyone sees themselves as having a stake in this, rather than hoping that someone else is going to prop up the media industry because that's not happening.

Laxmi Parthasarathy: I think in terms of philanthropy, if I can pick up on that point, unrestricted funding for news organizations is absolutely critical. In moments of crisis especially, but in general, investing in operations and high-quality employment models for local journalists is key, and it's going to lead to better journalism and higher quality information. The other integral piece is, when we're talking about partnerships and any kind of potential collaboration between international news organizations and local news organizations, we really have to think about just allowing local reporters to set their own storytelling priorities. That's going to lead to safer reporting, with their own personal risk assessment, but also better stories. When we're not sending reporters out to say, "Go get me the Ebola story," versus, "What is actually happening in your community and let's investigate it." It really leads to a different result.

Sulemana Braimah: If I may chip in, I think what we are learning is the fact that pre-COVID the media was in a crisis of mistrust. Indeed, one of the challenges in terms of our press freedom work, advocacy work, more freedom for journalists' work, was always the question about, "Yes, we've always talked about press freedom and yet the journalists are corrupt. We are not seeing the value of journalism." Suddenly, it is the journalists who are on the battlefield together with the police, the military, the doctors and the nurses. Now everybody in their homes because of lockdowns, realizes the importance of the journalist's work. And that is true for governments as well. Because when the whole thing started, governments, due to the same mistrust for journalists, they didn't see the value until it got to the point where they realized that public education was critical in combatting the pandemic.

Therefore, they had to rely on journalists perhaps more than they would rely on the police, the military, or even the doctors and nurses. I think what this whole challenge has presented is an opportunity for us to re-engage, to open up the space for people to have more trust for journalists, and for governments to begin to adopt policies that would open up the space for journalism to thrive. But that would not take us too far in terms of people getting back to the mistrust cycle, if we are unable to support journalists to now continue the good work that they do or they did under COVID. And that will require a lot of newsroom support. Again, I think the whole concept of non-profit newsrooms is a concept that we may want to begin to experiment with traditional media organizations that were relying solely on advertising and government revenue.

So yes, the opportunity to rebuild the trust that we had lost and therefore open up the space for engagement with governments in terms of repealing criminal libel

laws, defamation laws and opening up the space. Also financing newsrooms to ensure that media journalists will be able to continue to do good journalism that would continue to build the trust that we have lost.

Heba Aly: By the way, many non-profit newsrooms have done better than commercial newsrooms in this crisis. For what that's worth.

Ayman Mhanna: I will give an example to reiterate the point of my colleagues related to the importance of economic livelihoods for journalists to be able to do their work, an example from across the MENA region. Today, because of the economic crisis that is affecting the media sector, we are witnessing a brain drain of the best journalists toward where the money is, and not necessarily toward where independent media is. I'm specifically talking about Gulf cooperation countries, such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia. It's the right of journalists to seek a place where they can get decent salaries, lower taxes, really good quality of life on a daily basis. At the same time, we need to wonder what it means for the diversity and the quality of the media fabric that would remain in countries such as Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan, when their best and brightest have to work for organizations that need to integrate the political structure where they work to sustain for their families.

I would also like to comment on the non-profit media, where there is huge potential and some of them have managed to weather the crisis better because they were not truly dependent on the economic cycles. While fully supporting that, let's also not hug them and force them to, I mentioned it once, drink from the fire hose in the sense that we know that there is a problem with traditional media outlets being captured. That effort, the effort of the independent ones, is actually much better. People are trusting them. Pouring support in terms of money without having a long-term view about their business model, and their capacity to absorb, and how they will deal with it once the funding cycles end, might not be the right gift at the right moment. Whereas integrating strong funding with a perspective of real capacity building, strong employment policies that Laxmi mentioned, and try to flatten the curve but on the upward trend, on a long-term basis. This can truly help them and have a very good impact on the sector.

Heba Aly: I would say that sometimes, because I completely agree, we need diversification. For instance, as an organization, a non-profit newsroom that is largely grant funded, we are now investing in how do we generate our own revenue, what are different business models that can supplement that grant funding? I think at times donors are very unrealistic about how quickly you can get to an independent financial model and the extent to which some degree of grant support will likely be part of any future of journalism. Some will manage without it and some will be much too dependent on it.

Sulemana Braimah: Absolutely. But it's better for many independents' small structure to know that they have, say \$80,000 or \$100,000 US dollars a year over six years, than today giving them \$300,000. It has nothing to do even with the business model. It's how they can grow, how they can build their constituency, and how they don't have wrong expectations. Because we've seen it in many other sectors where there is such a strong enthusiasm to support certain sectors and then suddenly, for many reasons, a change. We're ahead of US elections. The transition between Bush Two and Obama

was a very difficult transition for many organizations in the MENA region. And it has nothing to do with who is right or who is wrong.

With all the money that was there, and the kind of support that was available towards the end of George W. Bush's second term and very early days of Barack Obama. And then how everything was changed when MEPI was rethought, where USAID had a different role, wasn't necessarily lived in a very positive way for organizations on the ground who had to deal with changes happening in Washington, DC, with no preparation on how to actually think more long term about the funding cycles that they experienced during a certain period of time.

Heather Gilberts: This is perfect. I'd like to make a plug for a panel that we are hosting tomorrow at the conference on donor responses to supporting independent journalism during crisis.

Maybe you could just add any closing remarks on anything we've discussed today before we sort of close the session.

Heba Aly: Just a hopeful note, I guess, that we all take the time to recognize, step back from this crisis and say, "Okay, how do all of us build back better in a way?" And that's partly on us in the media industry. Ours is not a very good example, but I think many in the media, when the crisis hit, suddenly started taking down their paywalls and recognizing their public service role in a way they hadn't necessarily been doing before. Hopefully that reinvigorates within the media the responsibility or the duty to be providing journalism that actually helps people manage this crazy world.

Also, for consumers, for funders, and for everyone else, to be saying if, as we have been all arguing during the last hour, this crisis has awoken all of us to just how important reliable information is, what are you doing to help sustain that? And what are you doing to ensure that it can survive in the future, given this crazy landscape? Yes, that will involve innovation, that will involve new business models, but how can you be part of the solution to that? That would be my challenge to everyone.

Heather Gilberts: Thank you. Any other closing remarks?

Laxmi Parthasarathy: I'd just end with we've been talking a lot about journalism in times of crisis, and just a request for funders if they're listening to this conversation. Are you asking the organizations that you're funding, that you're supporting, whether they are taking into consideration the well-being of their reporters? Whether you're implementing safety and security strategies for reporters that are on the ground. These are really important questions to ask and not just about the final product and the media capture that often happens in that final product.

Again, we're talking so much about the systems around journalism, but there have been some incredible stories that have been covered over the last couple of months related to the consequences of this pandemic on local communities. I really encourage people to read the stories, to really take the time to appreciate the incredible local journalism that's been produced in 2020. There is a lot of incredible reporting around the world, and our stories are on globalpressjournal.com.

Sulemana Braimah: Well, I think my parting comments would be that so far, a lot of incredible conversations have happened. I think the COVID situation has helped us to learn

quite a lot. Within the media space, I think the conversations are more about journalism and the newsrooms, and not much conversation is taking place in terms of the journalist associations, the journalist unions, the media support organizations that help to keep the environment open for journalists to work. I think that if there's one particular thing that we've learned, it's also about how this whole thing propelled us into strengthening our networks within the region.

Even as we had hundreds of journalists arrested, detained and so on, no journalist as I speak is in jail because of a COVID-related infraction. That is because a network of media defence organizations, media support institutions, came together and made sure that yes, a journalist can be arrested, detained for an hour, or for 30 minutes, but no journalist should go to jail for a COVID-related offense.

Sulemana Braimah: Just hoping to continue the conversation in general with CIMA, but also with my colleagues on the panel, because we clearly see that there is a potential that we need to all tap into and explore further for South to South. We won't only look at the journalism crisis from a Southern perspective, but there are very creative things, really good initiatives taking place in the South. So, networks that would facilitate South-to-South cooperation would probably bring part of the solution and also a response to needs from contexts that look like each other even more. There is very good potential there.

Heather Gilberts: Thank you for that. Just a couple of closing remarks from my side. This panel has been an excellent overview of the difficulty and importance of independent media during crisis in countries around the globe, and particularly in the Global South. The COVID-19 crisis throws a harsh light, not only on the growing weakness of independent media, but also, as we've been discussing extensively, the inadequacy of efforts to support and protect it. In many developing countries, advertising revenue will never be sufficient to support independent media organizations. In fact, all of the panellists indicated that they're all donor funded. International aid is a critical aspect of the ability for these organizations and news outlets to survive.

This brings us to the end of our time together today. I would like to thank everyone very much for attending and, in particular, I would like to thank our panellists for sharing their time and experiences with us and for really bringing such interesting insights to the table. So thank you very much.



JOURNALISM IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

MENTAL HEALTH AND COVID-19 COVERAGE

PANEL

Moderator: Matthew Pearson, Carleton University

Speakers: Dr. Anthony Feinstein, University of Toronto; Kiran Nazish, the Coalition for Women in Journalism;
Jane Seyd, North Shore News; Jad Shahrour, Samir Kassir Foundation

Matthew Pearson: Good afternoon and welcome to Journalism in the Time of Crisis Symposium organized by Carleton University. My name is Matthew Pearson. I am an assistant professor of journalism and I will be moderating today's panel on COVID-19 and mental health.

Joining me today are Dr. Anthony Feinstein, a neuro-psychiatrist and professor of psychiatry at the University of Toronto. Jane Seyd, a reporter for British Columbia's *North Shore News*. Jad Shahrour, communications Officer with Lebanon's Samir Kassir Foundation. And finally, Kiran Nazish, the founding director of the Coalition for Women in Journalism.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging that Carleton University is located on the unceded, unsundered and traditional territory of the Algonquin First Nation. And we owe it to them to respect this land, its stories and its keepers. We all benefit greatly from the freedom and opportunity we are able to enjoy on this land.

Here's how today's panel is going to work. I'm going to introduce each guest and ask them to make a few opening remarks. Then I'll pose some questions and we'll get some discussion going. Then it's your turn. Please take this opportunity to ask whatever's on your mind and we'll try to get in as many questions as we can. So let's get started. Dr. Anthony Feinstein is a leading voice on how journalists are affected when they report on extreme events, such as the 9/11 terror attacks and the Iraq war. He is the author of several books, including *Journalists Under Fire: The Psychological Hazards of Covering War*. In 2012, he produced a documentary called *Under Fire*, which was the winner of a Peabody Award in 2012. He joins us from Toronto. Dr. Feinstein, welcome.

Dr. Anthony Feinstein: Hi Matt. Thank you. At the height of the pandemic back in April, I was approached by the group at Oxford University, the Reuters Institute for the study of Journalism, by a colleague of mine, Mira Silva. She said, "Would you be able to undertake a study looking at how journalists were being affected by the pandemic?" Because we have a well-established methodology of getting journalism research done, we were able to do this quite quickly. I'm pleased to report that our university moved with lightning speed in terms of getting ethics approval. There's a real sense of urgency with respect to the COVID pandemic to cut through all the bureaucracy and get things done quickly. So we got ethics permission very quickly. We established a methodology, and two large journalism organizations that wanted to be part of the study opened up their own index of names of journalists to us. We were able to contact them the way we've done with numerous studies in the past, through a dedicated website devoted to the study.

We approached 150 journalists. The response rate was extremely strong, close to 70 percent of journalists replied and wanted to take part in this study. To put that into a social science context, to get this kind of response rate is really quite remarkable because the typical response rate from internet surveys is around 30 percent or less. We looked at symptoms of anxiety and depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. And we also captured some basic demographic details and how their work as journalists had been affected by the pandemic. I'll give you a summary of what the results show.

About 55 percent of our respondents were women, which is somewhat unusual for our studies, where when we looked at conflict zones and war zones, the majority of journalists would be men. Here you've got a slight majority of women. The average age was in their forties. What's interesting is that over 50 percent of the journalists were working almost exclusively on COVID-related stories, even though they were not health journalists to begin with. Their portfolio had not been to focus on health-related issues. Because the story is so big, they had been given this portfolio of news stories. We found that news organizations were asking younger journalists to do the COVID work, which was interesting. We think that news managers were aware of the increased risks that come with age. When you get close to the virus, we know now that elderly people are more vulnerable to the effects of the virus. And it seems as though, at least this is my interpretation of it, that news managers asked the younger journalists to do the frontline work when it came to covering the COVID story, which was interesting.

Another finding that I think it was quite remarkable was that over 50 percent of the journalists had accepted counselling. They were often helped by the news organizations, and they've accepted counseling, which I think is a quantum shift for the industry to see so many journalists accepting psychological help, which would be offered by management, and I'll show you why this was important. When it came to looking at the psychological results, we found that the rate of clinically significant anxiety was 25 percent. That's very high. This was what we call a point prevalence. At a moment in time, the rate of anxiety was 25 percent. When you look at data pre-pandemic, you see that rates of anxiety over the course of a lifetime do not even approach 20 percent. For depression, it was 20 percent. Once again, very high relative to what it was pre-pandemic. We found much lower rates of PTSD, but even there, the rate was elevated compared to what it had been pre-pandemic.

We showed that the journalists who were covering the pandemic were more likely to be anxious or psychologically distressed or show symptoms of PTSD. And because these journalists were more likely to be young, we saw higher rates of psychological distress in younger journalists. And this is unusual. When we look at our data sets accumulated over 20 years of research, we see that distress often goes up with age. Here we're seeing something different, with younger journalists showing more distress. And that's because they were in the frontlines covering the story.

What we did find, and this is good news, is that those journalists who had taken advantage of therapy offered to them were significantly less anxious or depressed, and had significantly fewer symptoms of PTSD. So, no surprise, therapy helps. It works. This is what I've been doing my entire life, but you've got some objective evidence in real-time to show that those journalists who accepted the therapy that was offered, did much better psychologically than those who are not getting therapy.

A couple of other interesting findings. Journalists reported that the workload had increased following the pandemic. They have many more stories to cover, and they felt stressed by this increase in workload. A final point, and I think reasonably good news is that we asked journalists to rate what they saw as their news organization's openness to helping them, how supportive was your news organization during the pandemic? We gave them a simple analog scale, zero being no support, 10 being

very supportive. And the score was six, which is not bad. Journalists for the most part saw their organizations as helpful to them. In particular, they took advantage of the psychological therapy that was offered to them to good effect, which helped with their anxiety and depression. So Matt, you asked me to speak for about five to six minutes. I think I've used up my time slot. I'll be happy to come back and talk more about the data later.

Matthew Pearson: Thank you Dr. Feinstein. Just quickly, you mentioned that two news organizations were eager to participate. What country were those news organizations in?

Dr. Anthony Feinstein: They were international. They've got bureaus all over the world. One is predominantly based in England and the other one in France, but they are international and they have their journalists scattered to the four quarters of the world. So responses came back from Canada, the United States, continental Europe and Asia.

Matthew Pearson: Thank you for that. We look forward to digging into more of that research.

We're going to go next to Jane Seyd all the way out in beautiful British Columbia. For more than 15 years, Jane has been a reporter for the *North Shore News*, which serves the communities of North Vancouver and West Vancouver. She reports on a wide range of topics, including courts, crime, local politics, education, as well as mountain rescues, because she's in British Columbia and there are occasional bear sightings when bears wander into her community. Jane's frontline reporting on COVID-19 includes numerous stories about the Lynn Valley Care Centre where Canada's first COVID-19 death was recorded on March 8th. In all, at least 20 residents from the home have died as a result of COVID-19. I'm very pleased to welcome Jane from the sunshine coast.

Jane Seyd: Hello. Yes, I'm a reporter with the *North Shore News*. We are a suburban community on the North Shore of Burrard Inlet. We're in the greater Vancouver area in British Columbia and it's quite an affluent community. I'm a general reporter. I usually cover things like courts and crime, education and politics, and traffic congestion and housing prices plus a whole range of general issues. Pre-pandemic, I was not a health reporter. I was not a science reporter. I would go to court. I would do interviews. I would go to press conferences. So, I was in a very different scenario leading up to COVID.

Back in February, we started to hear a little bit about COVID in our community. There wasn't a lot of news, but we have a number of residents in our communities in North and West Vancouver who are either immigrants or who have ties to family members in other countries, such as Mainland China and Iran. We began hearing little bits of information from those communities. For instance, parents who usually organize a Lunar New Year event at their school, were suddenly cancelling those, even though they weren't being told to. We started hearing about Newroz festivities, the Iranian New Year festivities that usually go on and they're usually quite a big deal on the North Shore. Organizers were starting to talk about cancelling those. We began to get a feeling that something different was going on here.

One interesting tidbit is that it was actually through the cases that began to pop up in British Columbia, from travellers who had come back from Iran, that authorities

at the World Health Organization began to understand that the numbers in Iran were quite different from what the official sources had been talking about. This was because there were so many of them popping up that, doing the numbers and extrapolating backwards, it just wasn't reasonable that the numbers that officially were given were accurate. And that ended up being true, there were far higher numbers in Iran than the WHO had originally thought.

I feel the first week of March was a real tipping point. That was when we first heard that they had COVID in a North Vancouver senior's home, the Lynn Valley Care Centre, which is a private care centre, but it's supported like most are with government funding. There's a mix of private and public beds in that facility. Very shortly afterwards, a few days, we learned that the first person in Canada to die of COVID was a man who had been living at that senior's home. He was a frail man in his eighties. And a couple of days later, I found myself speaking to his daughter about that experience. She described to me being told that her father was dying and being allowed to go in, but basically having to gown up in full PPE like a hazmat suit scenario and go into his room and say goodbye to him that way. It just seemed like something out of a science fiction story. This wasn't something that we'd seen before.

Of course, after that, the stories were to get much worse. Twenty people in that first nursing home did end up dying of COVID and it spread to other nursing homes, as we know. But at the time, we didn't really know what was going to happen. We knew that they were setting up tents outside the local hospital, to triage and assess people for COVID. We knew that there was a new COVID ward being set up at our local hospital, which was one of the first hospitals in the province to take in COVID patients into a specialized ward.

That was when I became a COVID reporter. The pandemic changed what we were writing about very significantly in a very short period of time. It also changed how we were reporting in significant ways as well. Previously, in a community paper like mine, as well as news, obviously there would be lots of community events covered. There would be arts, things that were happening. There would be sports. All of a sudden, with the restrictions that were put into place because of COVID, things such as arts events and sports events, they largely disappeared and COVID took over and it stayed that way for several months. Things have adapted now, they are a little bit more normal, but it was a very strange sort of sudden change in what we were reporting on.

I'm still covering COVID. I do still report on all of those other things like bears and mountain rescues and provincial elections, which we currently have going on here in British Columbia. I would say that about one-half to one-third of my stories right now are COVID stories. B.C. is one of the areas in the country that is doing relatively well. Although we are now into our second wave, and cases are going up. There's lots of discussion about what the case numbers versus the hospitalization numbers mean. Definitely our pandemic is concentrated in the lower mainland of British Columbia, the area around Vancouver, and particularly in the Fraser Valley. I do watch the numbers quite carefully, North and West Vancouver have been among the communities that have had a higher incidence. I'm not sure exactly why that is. I would like to know more and I can talk a little bit later about the difficulty of drilling

down into some of that information, but compared to many places in the world and many places in Canada, we're doing pretty well. It continues to be a story that has really occupied a very large space in my reporting and a very large space in terms of what readers seem to want to be reading as well.

Matthew Pearson: Thank you Jane. That's a great introduction. We look forward to drilling down a bit into that. I'd like to now introduce Jad Shahrour. He is a journalist, civil society activist and a communications officer at the Samir Kassir Foundation in Lebanon. His work revolves around using media to advance social cohesion, tolerance and to defend freedom of expression and digital rights. In the aftermath of the devastating August 4th explosion in Beirut, he has helped the Samir Kassir Foundation launch the media recovery fund, which aims to help the country's media workers access medical, and psychosocial support, replace damaged equipment and conduct robust investigative work. He joins us from Beirut. Good evening Jad, thank you for being here.

Jad Shahrour: Thank you for having me tonight. It's 8:00 p.m. in Lebanon. I know it's 1:00 p.m. there. I very much appreciate hearing all these experiences from around the world. Lebanon is a bit weird in the Middle East. If we are talking about the whole world in the era of high-speed internet, we don't have those technologies, but we have a lot of political events. Three weeks ago, we used to be as journalists, activists, all of the people in Lebanon are. All the media is shedding light on COVID-19, facts, numbers, best practices, what is going on with the hospitals, and in people's homes, everything. Then, comes the crime on the 4th of August, the big explosion that until now there's no official answer to what really happened. And for two weeks people didn't talk about COVID because of the high death toll, injuries, and people without homes. If they are facing already COVID-19, now they are facing COVID-19 without money because we have a currency crisis, and now the media is shedding light on the government information. So, we have a lot of political events. COVID is one of our news stories, but today it's not our top news. If we are talking about health, it should be our top news because until now we don't have someone to trust when it comes to numbers, to facts, because we still believe that hospitals are being obliged to give numbers to the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health is under the control of Hezbollah, one of the major political parties in Lebanon, and everyone knows Hezbollah is one of the most controversial political parties in the region with a lot of questions around their work, what they do. And we are facing this too.

COVID is not our top news. But at the same time, we need to talk about that, even the media sector, who is really under the control of 12 political parties in Lebanon because they are funding the media. The content of this media is only the political stories of these families, not the real stories, not the real numbers, not the real facts about COVID and how we can protect ourselves. More than that, the journalists are facing difficulties because the media association didn't help the journalists by funding them, explaining how to protect themselves, how to take medical kits to go to ground. They didn't protect them in going to the hospitals.

They didn't give them open sources to have real facts, real numbers. One of the biggest problems in the earlier weeks of COVID, when it was easy to get on the Lebanese streets, the political tactics used the lockdown as a tool of repression. The first day, they prevented the journalists from going down into the streets. Then we

raised our voices. How can we cover these stories if we don't have permission as a journalist to go into the streets, to ask the hospitals about numbers, best practices, to meet the people who should talk to the media about COVID-19. Even now, we still are facing these problems covering COVID-19. But at the same time, we have another struggle, which is the explosion of the of August 4th

Matthew Pearson: Thank you, Jad. Of course, our thoughts are with Lebanon because of that explosion and the aftermath of the explosion. You had also mentioned numbers and that issue. I did check the World Health Organization's website today, and it says that there were 1,241 new cases of COVID-19 in Lebanon today, and a total of 536 deaths. I'd like to bring in Kiran Nazish. Kiran, thank you so much for joining us. Kiran got her start working for a newspaper in her native Pakistan at the age of 16. She has worked as a reporter in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Pakistan, covering terrorism, foreign policy and conflict. In 2017, she founded The Coalition For Women In Journalism, which pioneered the first global mentorship program for mid-career women journalists. She is currently a distinguished visiting professor at Brandon University in Manitoba on the beautiful Canadian Prairies. And that's where she joins us from today. Welcome Kiran.

Kiran Nazish: Thank you so much. I think there's a lot that has happened during COVID. As you know, I will speak a little bit about women journalists because our work focuses on how women reporters work. Our research focuses on that as well, our networks are for women. However, to do this work, obviously we have to look at the entire landscape of journalism. A lot of the trends that we're seeing do apply to the industry, but I'll tell you a little bit about the data and the other work that I will share. We'll reveal more about how women have been working on the frontline.

Regarding the mental health challenge, I know that today at this consortium, there will be conversations about safety and other aspects of this, so I'm not going to go into the details of that. But I think that talking only about mental health, one of the reasons this COVID-19 event and the spread of the virus and the lockdowns that followed, the virus has really affected journalists in general and women reporters as well, is that there is an uncertainty of what is going to happen. That uncertainty, well journalists are human beings, and that uncertainty, whether it's political, whether it is about a disease, whether it's about being on the frontline or losing a job, that uncertainty has really triggered a lot of mental health challenges. Some of them are not that severe. And sometimes we have also seen journalists, a lot of journalists reporting about panic attacks.

Dr. Anthony Feinstein shared their research, which is really helpful as well, to understand how journalists are facing this challenge. We don't have a lot of that work going on. But to begin, I would just say that around mid-March, during the spread of COVID-19, we started documenting through our network, how women reporters were on the frontline. As the lockdowns were beginning, we were seeing all kinds of industries shutting down, which also meant for a lot of journalists, working from home. So, in the beginning, mid-March, late-March, we were hearing about a lot of newsrooms telling their reporters to work from home. And a lot of freelancers also were trying to improvise. At that time, we were thinking it's going to be a couple of weeks. We thought that it would go on until April. And by April, of course, it was very clear that this is going to go on for a long time, the lockdowns are going to be prolonged.

One of the biggest challenges we saw, was the financial challenge. A lot of journalists lost their jobs, within our network as well. We've seen around 80 percent of journalists lose their jobs, in the newsrooms or the majority of them are freelancers. These women reporters were reporting from everywhere. They are not able to continue with their work.

One major trend that happened almost everywhere around the world, was that journalists were reporting on education, health, culture and politics and suddenly the entire beat became COVID. So, on the one hand, we saw that journalists did not have opportunities, but on the other hand, we also saw that journalists were improvising, and they started working, changing the beat and gaining new expertise and spending a lot more time on health and going on the frontline and reporting on COVID-19. There are two things I want to mention about mental health, because we are talking about the mind and how it has affected journalists.

There has been a lot of stress and anxiety being on the frontline, the financial loss and the loss of jobs has really caused a lot of anxiety. I think that Dr. Anthony Feinstein mentioned that younger reporters are facing a lot of mental health issues. And I think that might be linked to the fact that younger reporters are facing uncertainty because they have a future ahead and they don't know if they can carry on in the industry or not. And that is true with a lot of women as well. A lot of women have families. We saw that when women journalists were on the frontline, one of the major concerns was, of course, they had to prepare themselves because in the beginning, newsrooms were not really prepared for it. After a month and a half, we started seeing journalism support organizations, and newsrooms preparing journalists to work on the frontline.

But in the beginning, there was a lot of preparation anxiety as well, are we prepared? Journalists did not know enough about how they needed to be prepared. What kind of mask to wear? Where to get that mask? Until a month ago, we were seeing a lot of reports of journalists connecting to us from different cities to understand where they can be tested, how they can travel and airport regulations, as a lot of our members are foreign correspondents. Travelling from one country to another and planning your travels, and you're reporting according to the lockdowns and aligning with all of that. These kinds of challenges have been present and going back to my previous point about the frontlines, being on the frontline. I think women journalists have had that preparation challenge, which has caused a lot of anxiety, not knowing what to do, and then improvising. I think Jane mentioned some of these things as well.

It's very important to understand how an individual journalist would have to improvise. I think a lot of times journalists, whether they were in the newsroom or they were freelancers, they had to prepare themselves and figure things out on their own. One of the other things that we saw with women reporters that is still true, is that when they're going to the frontline and reporting from hospitals, and generally even on politics, going to press conferences, they come back home and they fear bringing the virus back with them. We see a lot of women reporters having to limit themselves to not exposing their families. There was Thanksgiving in Canada, and a lot of reporters were thinking about whether they should go and meet their family during that time.

I think a lot about those things. Our personal life as journalists, as well as the political situation in the country has really affected COVID-19 and the ability of the industry to be prepared for this. I would say that one of the other important things that is true, and Jad was talking about this in Lebanon, a lot of our members are in Lebanon as well. We also work in the Middle East so Turkey, Lebanon and Egypt. Some of these countries, Pakistan, India, there are certain countries where we have seen an increase of violations against journalists and an increase of censorship during COVID.

Like Jad mentioned, we are also seeing a very real increase by states in utilizing this opportunity to censor the press. We see that governments, states and regimes that want to censor the press or spread misinformation are taking opportunity of COVID-19 lockdowns to suppress people and not let journalists come out or let journalists have access to for instance, the parliament, or be able to do their job on the frontline and be able to have access to hospitals and so on. There are so many incidents that we don't have time to cover that.

Matthew Pearson: I hear that. I would love to actually, if we can, start getting into bringing in some other folks. I don't know if you have a closing thought you want to make right now Kiran.

Kiran Nazish: Yes. I think I would just say that everything has been heightened during COVID-19, the financial crisis for journalists, the press freedom challenges for journalists and the spread of misinformation that has challenged journalists in a way that they are uncertain about whether they can do their job, whether they are financially stable or not, and whether they can carry on safely to be able to be there and do their job. That is something that has caused a lot of anxiety, as well as we are seeing an increase of panic attacks among journalists, and also a lot of mental health issues.

Matthew Pearson: Thank you so much. We've got such great context to start with from four points of view from around the world. Anthony, one of the things that I picked up on from what Kiran was saying, was about early in the pandemic, when we didn't know how long this would be, in fact, in April, you wrote a piece for *The Globe and Mail* in which you said journalists are highly resilient, but they are not immune from the emotional toll that comes with covering dangerous and traumatic events.

In many parts of Canada and around the world, we are seeing that a second phase is upon us. I wonder, what worries you most, when you think about journalists who remain on the frontlines of COVID reporting?

Dr. Anthony Feinstein: If I could just follow up with something that Kiran said, which I think is so relevant. We now recognize, I think that the predominant emotion with the pandemic is one of anxiety. The reason for that is all the uncertainty, and Kiran spoke to this, there are so many uncertain things. You wake up in the morning and aspects of our life that we take for granted are no longer there, we've just lost control. We're uncertain about infection rates and when we're going to get on top of it. We're uncertain about the economy, unemployment, we're uncertain about whether we are going to get back to the office and whether there are going to be jobs for us. In the context of so much uncertainty and so much loss of control, it's understandable why people are becoming anxious. They were anxious from the very beginning. I think we have entered a different phase now.

The emergency rooms aren't crowded with COVID patients, at least not yet. In our hospital, the wards are not full the way they were with COVID patients a few months back, although they may still be coming because of the second wave. But I think what they realize now, is that the risk of infection is of course still there, it hasn't gone, but we're in it for the long haul. There's a sense of exhaustion, a sense of fatigue around how we are going to sustain our energy for what clearly is a long and difficult story. And it's going to be around for a long time. It becomes very difficult to do that if you're focused on the uncertainty and the things that you can't control. I think this is a very important therapeutic point because I put it across in the sessions that I do with news organizations. At a time like this, you've got to avoid what we call catastrophic thinking in which one negative thought slips into the next one, in which you're focused on those things that you can't control.

You have to recognize now that it is a period of uncertainty, that many of the variables that create this uncertainty are beyond our control and that if you're going to devote your emotional resources to focusing on that, you will become exhausted and dispirited, and you won't have the stamina and the endurance to keep your emotional equilibrium through what is going to be a very long and difficult winter. The antidote to that is to shift your thinking towards those things in your life that you can control. The small aspects of your day-to-day existence that you can still control. And it sounds simplistic to say this, but you can control things like your sleep and what you eat and your social contacts and the importance of staying in contact with people because we know that relationships nourish us, they support us. That good connections are important for our mental well-being.

If you grow to be distant from people and you can't go into the bureau, when you can't see your colleagues and you don't have that usual level of contact with individuals, it's quite easy to lose touch with people. You can withdraw into this very small, isolated world, and that's not good. You can control that. You can make a conscious effort not to do that. You can also control things such as I'm going to do some exercise. I'm still going to remain physically active. And most importantly, we come to this concept that we call respite as a form of resilience, and that's not my terminology. But I think it's absolutely key, respite as a form of resilience. What do I mean by that? It's that you cannot spend all your energy and your time focusing on the pandemic and the things that you can't control.

You've got to implant into your life, if you haven't done it already, those things that nourish you, that are separate from all this uncertainty — your social contacts, your hobbies, your interests, your family, and going for a walk, the kind of things that separate you from the intensity of the moment. It's essential that you do that. And that's my message to journalists. In fact, that's my message to society in general. But here we're talking to journalists, that you want your moments of respite. They've never been more important. And as the world shrinks around you and becomes much smaller, those quiet moments of respite, those moments in which you are with yourself doing something that you enjoy doing, take on an added significance and an added importance.

Matthew Pearson: Just quickly Dr. Feinstein, I wanted to ask, you talked about control. Do you think that is one of the reasons why we have seen this trend that people are baking sourdough bread? Is it this idea that we have something to take care of? We have something

that sort of keeps us on a schedule. I'm not doing it, but my friends are, and I see that there's so much care taken, but would you say that that is actually what's happening?

Dr. Anthony Feinstein: Yes, absolutely. That is your moment of respite. People are looking for things to do that they can still do, that they can still control. They're learning a skill; they can bake some dough. And the same as your friends, they're suddenly giving me their bread.

Matthew Pearson: I welcome it.

Dr. Anthony Feinstein: In my entire life I've never been offered bread, but suddenly people are baking it. And yes, these are the moments of respite that build resilience and they are very, very important.

Matthew Pearson: Thank you for sharing that. Jane, you referenced this, but I was hoping that you would talk more about it. You talked about covering that first COVID-19 death back in March, on March 8th. As you mentioned, you did actually speak to the daughter of the man who died. I wonder if you could, for a couple of minutes, take us back to that day. How did you approach that story and what was going through your mind when you filed it?

Jane Seyd: Well, it all happened very, very quickly. It wasn't as though I, or anybody else on that beat, had time to think a lot about how we were going to approach it and sort of craft it really. On that particular day, I found myself on the phone to this woman who was very gracious in the midst of a scary situation. She actually wanted to thank some of the health-care workers who had been there for her dad in those final couple of days, and that was really why she was willing to talk. But obviously in the course of that conversation, she did talk about the situation that she had encountered at the care centre. That's one of the things that I experienced in reporting the story. It was people like the families who have been impacted by COVID-19 and the health-care workers who have dealt with it and have been working around it who have really provided us with our window into the situation. My experience, and that of a number of my colleagues, has been that official information has been somewhat difficult to come by.

Or at times, it hasn't been 100 percent accurate, shall we say. In the early days of the Lynn Valley Care Centre outbreak, definitely we were being told that there was an outbreak there and obviously health officials were very concerned about it and were expressing that. We were also being told at various points that things were under control, that they had a plan, and it was being handled. But we were also receiving phone calls and emails and texts from family members who had been inside the care centre to see their loved ones who were telling us no, that's not the situation. It's not under control, there's hardly any staff here. Nobody's feeding these people. Nobody's attending to their basic personal care needs, medication isn't getting to them. Now, obviously that situation was resolved, but there was a period of time where things were quite concerning and quite dire.

I managed to speak to a number of family members. They were all daughters of people who were in Lynn Valley Care Centre, and they came to me a couple of months after the crisis had really hit. They wanted to share their stories about what they had seen and experienced inside. One woman, her mother had died of COVID-19 in Lynn Valley Care Centre, and they were amazingly gracious and generous with what they were willing to share. What they talked about really

highlighted the fact that there had been a problem in care centres for a long time beforehand, in terms of how much funding there was, the level of staffing that was happening. But we didn't really see it before the pandemic because it's not a sexy topic. It's not something that tends to win votes. It's not something that you even necessarily see unless you have a family member who is experiencing it. And by that time, you're in the thick of it. That's when probably alerting the public isn't the first priority for you. There had been reports on the situation that had been going out for a number of years in B.C. We have a Seniors Advocate and she had been writing, raising the alarm about the situation for a number of years and there had been small incremental changes that were happening. But the pandemic really focused attention on the situation of our long-term care homes and in terms of how the situation had even developed to begin with. Which is complicated but has a lot to do with government priorities and resources and money, and the fact that we tend not to see people when they're old. All of these things made for a very interesting story. It was a very heartbreaking story and I think it really highlighted the willingness of ordinary people to come forward and share their experiences and how important that was to covering the story and remains so today.

Matthew Pearson: Thank you so much for sharing. It sounds like stories that we're talking about that stay with you, and that are difficult to report.

Jad, you have already referenced the situation in Lebanon on August 4th. I'll just remind folks, this was a catastrophic explosion in the port that left more than 200 people dead, 6,500 people wounded, and 300,000 people homeless. On any given day, a story of this magnitude would be such a challenge to cover, but to cover that in the midst of the political and economic turmoil of the country and a global pandemic, I wonder if you could shed some light on how journalists managed to cover both stories simultaneously, especially given some of them as you shared with me previously, have lost their homes or their cars, or their equipment. How have they managed to do this?

Jad Shahrour: It's not a joke but it's very hard to describe how Lebanese journalists are working nowadays with all these political events. I would say that if there's a Hollywood production and they're looking for new heroes for Marvel, then the perfect cast would be the Lebanese journalists because of the sheer volume of political events. In one week, you would be going back to your home, hear a huge explosion that takes your home, takes your equipment, your car, your relatives, your colleagues, and you need to cover all of that to take the picture and provide it to the public.

You need to talk about it. So, you need to be a robot, put your feelings aside and to work ethically to cover all these events to raise awareness to people, on what to do and what not to do, how to protect themselves, what should they do? We believe that there's a free media. If there were, then people would be more protected. I can say that a free media would save lives, but in Lebanon, we don't have this freedom. We don't have the luxury of freedom because of the political system, the sectarian system, the political and the economic situation.

All of these are against media ethics. There are journalists who are marginalized. Journalists are employees who are just trying to finish tasks by the end of the day, but there are the profit struggles and of all the expenses that journalists face. What

we did at Media Recovery Foundation, we said the words that the state would never say. We said that we y back you up. We run the biggest initiative for supporting journalists about the exporters, the medical support, trauma and psychosocial support, the equipment placement, the work environment, and we even go so far as to support aspects of the technical and developing tools for investigative work.

We said that if you are an investigative reporter and you want to share information, we will fund that report. Give us the information and we will hire the graphic designers, videographers, equipment, logistics, anything. We will support you because we believe in free journalism. We cannot live with this spirit any longer and we should work on raising awareness of ensuring freedom of the press as that will save lives.?

Matthew Pearson: Thank you so much. We really appreciate what you're sharing and particularly the information about the media, and the relief fund that your organization has set up. I wanted to bring in Kiran. You had talked about the fact that you raised the notion of disinformation and I wanted to say, reporting on something as complex as COVID-19 is difficult enough, and we've heard Jane and others say people who aren't health and science reporters find themselves covering a very complicated story, but many journalists are also battling rampant mis- and disinformation about the viruses, some of which is coming from political leaders and so I'm wondering from your perspective Kiran, what additional burden is this disinformation and dealing with it placing on journalists?

Kiran Nazish: I would say a great burden and multitudes of layers of burdens, a new post-COVID-19 world is different. The world has already changed with COVID-19 and how it has interacted with different elements of our society and civic life. I would say that there's one distinction I want to make, which I think is important. The lockdown, especially with COVID-19 and the anxiety and social anxiety and trauma of the spread of the virus, has changed the way journalism essentially works, but also how we respond. We are going to respond to the changes in the world. What I want to say is that different countries are going to experience a heightened form of what they already were. In the West, for example, in the US, Canada, Europe, European countries, we see a different tendency of how COVID-19 affected journalism and journalists and their ability to do their work.

A lot of the focus was on being able to deliver information. The way journalists were working was if they had access to hospitals, they were still able to report, and how COVID-19 affected them was more about safety, about personal well-being and anxiety, and so on. But there are certain parts of the world such as Lebanon, Egypt, Pakistan, India, Mexico, Eastern Europe, Belarus, Hungary, all of these countries, something different has happened after COVID-19, and that is the heightened political tensions in these countries. Governments and regimes have taken the opportunity of the lockdown and done a lot of different things. We're also seeing journalists facing the challenge of not worrying about the virus and not caring so much about COVID-19 and not even reporting on it.

A lot of our members in Pakistan, India, Mexico, have contracted the virus as well, as journalists are on the frontline and two women reporters died of COVID-19 after contracting the virus. There were more, they were both senior and we saw a lot of older women reporters afraid of going on the frontline as well, even though some

of them still had to. A veteran correspondent, Debbie Mason, who works on the Mexico-US border, she's covering this tension. On the one hand, the journalist has to cover the tension. With Debbie for example, she's on the border, she's covering the tension between ICE detention centers, where you have people in detention centres, contracting the virus, and she's trying to do her job and she's over 60, and worried about her own health.

Journalists have had to face a lot because they're covering very difficult stories. In Lebanon, 12 of our members were injured during the explosion at the port and almost all journalists were affected in some way by the explosion, their houses were damaged and they had physical injuries on top of the mental stress of being in the middle of a political crisis. In many parts of the world, journalists are not able to focus on COVID-19 as a disease, one example being Lebanon. Journalists on the one hand are covering the political crisis and on the other hand, we're seeing this increasing number of COVID cases at the hospitals.

In Lebanon, hospitals are reporting an increase of the virus, but we don't have the attention of the media to be able to cover that because of the political crisis going on. There are places where journalists don't have the time to have panic attacks and I truly mean that. I think journalists are busy covering the political crises that their governments are creating as well as being censored, and also trying to combat misinformation while they're trying to do their job and taking care of their families. What I think is going to happen after COVID-19 maybe in the summer of 2021, we will see what happens to journalists and how they are going to process the result of this.

Because of course, this trauma that they're suppressing, this happens to war correspondents as well. When we are on the frontline, we ignore the trauma and then we come back to a safe space and we have our panic attacks. I've been a war correspondent myself and I would say that usually it happens afterward. I think that there's going to be a greater challenge after, and we have to be prepared for that.

Matthew Pearson: Thank you. I want to bring in Anthony again. One of the things that Jad said that stuck out was this idea of people putting their feelings aside. I wanted to ask you, what reporters might do to maintain and promote their own mental wellness, this idea of sleeping, eating, social contact. I love the idea of respite as a form of resilience, but how might and what should news managers and news outlets do to actively support this? What is the responsibility of the employer here in these situations to support people? Then going to a question from the audience, which is, what tips do you have for journalists when they become overwhelmed with their coverage? What responsibility do you think employers have in this Dr. Feinstein?

Dr. Anthony Feinstein: I think they've got a very big responsibility and they've got a moral responsibility to look out for their journalists. If you're going to ask your men and women to take on a demanding, potentially dangerous and risky job, then you've got to ensure that you've got resources to help them, should they need it. I believe very passionately in this; there's a moral responsibility on the part of news organization and managers to look after the physical well-being of their staff, but also their psychological well-being. I believe at the end of the day, the greatest source of disability from the pandemic will probably end up being psychological disability, the mental effects of the pandemic and what it's done to our society. We see this all

the time in organizations. So, I think there's some simple steps. Our data show quite compellingly that those organizations that provided psychological support through some kind of limited counselling to their staff, made a very real difference.

The journalists who took up the counselling, show significantly less anxiety, less depression, less PTSD, less feelings of psychological distress. Clearly, counselling works. I'm not advocating in-depth, lengthy therapy. This is practical support or steps to help journalists doing very difficult work and they're to show that this can be helpful. I think the news organizations have to have that. That's a basic standard of care right now for journalists. People have created this dichotomy between physical illness and psychological illness; somehow, it's different and my argument to news organizations is this: if a journalist breaks their leg, you don't tell them to suck it up. You send them to a hospital and get the broken leg attended to.

When it comes to psychological difficulties, why would you not approach it with the same level of attention and care? You shouldn't have this attitude to suck it up and deal with it and show the right stuff. You've got to be sensitive to these emotional factors. It's not only good for the journalist, it's also good for the news organization. These organizations don't want unhealthy people working for them. You don't want to have a staff that's anxious or dispirited or despondent or depressed. It's in your best interest to make sure that this doesn't happen and by paying careful attention to mental health, it's good for everyone. There are nuances in this and the other point is that, as I say all the time, mental health is not expensive therapy. It's not costly like MRIs or surgery.

It's a cheaper form of medicine. You just want someone who's skilled that you can talk to, who can offer you the right assistance. It's really a no brainer to make this available to the journalists who are doing this work. The question that was asked online, I can address that now.

So, the question was, how do we manage out of stress? How do we manage all this uncertainty? The basic principles are these. You don't want to focus on all those things that you can't control. Since the pandemic has started. We have lost control of so many aspects of our lives and if that's where you're going to focus, you will become exhausted because you will not shift the needle. This is going to be there for many months. You have to focus and put your energies into those things that you can control, small things like your sleep, your appetite, your exercise, your social contacts, your moments of respite as a form of resilience, and you do that through planning and structure and repetition. Plan your lives. I mean, as journalists, you are very effective at doing things. You've been effective in your careers. You've made a success of your career. Use some of those skills that you've acquired and apply them to yourself and plan things and think about what do I need to do? Write out what your plan is going to be. What I tell journalists, when you start the day, each morning, have a blank piece of paper in front of you and write on the piece of paper a couple of things that are going to be your moments of respite during the day.

I think it's imperative that news organizations allow journalists to step back from their work, from the intensity of the story and say, "Devote some time to your well-being." Good organizations recognize that. They don't want you working 20-hour days, day after day. Step back from the intensity of the story that comes with so

much emotional baggage and devote some time to yourself and to your family and remember this, although the pandemic is this all-encompassing, embracing story, life goes on outside of the pandemic. You've got to look after your home. You've got to after your children. You've got to do the shopping. You've got to make sure that your appliances are working. You've got to make sure that the basic building blocks of life are not left unattended because that is what falls apart.

If that falls apart it becomes so much more difficult. That's why my sympathies and my heart goes out to people, such as Lebanese journalists who are having to do all of this in the context of this tremendous explosion that has shattered their daily life. I was asked to speak to a journalist in the immediate aftermath of the bombing in Beirut and she had lost her apartment and she had been wounded and she went to the local hospital where the focus was not on COVID anymore. You have to attend to all these wounded people and so the barriers that we have in place in Canada, where you go into a hospital with social distancing and all the basic things that public health tells us to do for the pandemic. In Beirut, because of the magnitude of what had happened with the explosion, the mental stress in situations like that is extraordinarily far beyond what we have to deal with in Canada where the stress is considerable. There are multiple things that need to be considered over here.

Matthew Pearson: Thank you Anthony. Very helpful. I have found that nature has been helpful. I think the reminder that life goes on regardless and to take a moment of, as you say, respite, where when the leaves change colour in Eastern Canada, that grounds you, that reminds you that life does go on beyond this big story.

Jane it's been brought up a couple of times, but the news business had fallen on quite hard times, even before the global pandemic was declared on March 11th, but it's only become worse as newspapers or magazines cut back production, laying off journalists, cutting pages and there are security measures that are another burden that journalists are dealing with. I wonder how this has played out in your newsroom? I'd be keen to hear what journalists you've reached out to have said about how the austerity related to the pandemic is making the job of a journalist even harder right now, and how that bears on their minds as they go about the work and this uncertainty.

Jane Seyd: Well, it is true that numerous organizations in Canada, although we certainly aren't facing the situations that I hear people like Jad talking about by any means, we've been facing challenges for a number of years in terms of competition from Facebook and aggregator sites and the rise of internet media and the pressures on traditional media. So, media had been struggling for a while and when COVID hit, it definitely put a huge stress on the news business here. Revenues plummeted and because large chunks of the economy were shut down that had a direct impact on advertising, which of course, funds our media. We did see a fairly immediate impact.

This was throughout Canada, throughout Metro Vancouver, that I'm most familiar with numerous news organizations that faced layoffs and wage rollbacks. Some newspapers closed entirely, and they haven't come back. We had layoffs in my own newsroom, and these are people who are senior reporters with a depth of knowledge in the community and they're not there anymore to bring their knowledge and experience to the stories that we're trying to tell. Luckily, we have

been able to bring one reporter back through some government assistance, which has helped.

I think that journalists are feeling they're having to do a lot more work with a lot fewer resources and there's a sense of trying to cover an enormous story and not having the resources to do it. Also, COVID has sucked all the air out of the room. There are other really important stories out there that we all know we should be getting to and we all feel guilty that we're not getting to, but there's only so many of us and so many hours in a day. The pressures that COVID and other factors have brought on news organizations have definitely impacted the newsrooms.

Matthew Pearson: Thank you very much for those insights. I am glad to hear you say that at least one of the positions that was discontinued at your news organization has been refilled by someone. Jad, I was hoping to bring you in here. One of the pillars of your foundation's Media Recovery Fund, which you've talked about, is trauma and psychosocial support for journalists. As we know, thanks to the work of Dr. Feinstein and others, including the Dark Institute, there has been growing awareness of the need for this, but I wonder how attuned to this phenomenon are journalists and media outlets in Lebanon? Are there barriers in Lebanon that might prevent a journalist who is struggling from seeking this psychosocial help that you hope to offer through the recovery fund?

Jad Shahrour: Actually, the six pillars that I mentioned in our media recovery fund, we communicated those in a way that let everyone who wants to join this recovery fund, or to get the benefit of one of the pillars, to get it privately. It's a private application and the information isn't shared about who did participate in a specific pillar, whether it's about medical support or trauma and therapist support. We are trying to encourage journalists to join this, to get the benefit of this initiative, because we believe that they might be shy in joining for the medical support or the psychological treatment. We did publish in Arabic, some of Dr. Feinstein's best practices through several articles or interviews he did. We have his recommendations on our website in English and in Arabic.

We are trying to promote the information that he's provided. Thank you very much for sharing such good and supportive information, because we believe if we connect such information to Lebanese journalists, they would be more encouraged to talk about the trauma. I believe in Lebanon that it's very difficult for someone who is traumatized from the blast on August 4th.

Matthew Pearson: Thank you so much. Kiran, there's a question in the chat that I would put to you, and it is what is the most valuable thing that journalists can learn about journalism and story coverage from covering this pandemic?

Kiran Nazish: I think that's a very good question, because the pandemic has changed so much around the world, right? I think that one thing that journalists and the industry have really learned from this pandemic is that anything can happen at any time and that we are not prepared, but we should be prepared, whether it is the spread of COVID-19 and the lockdowns that happened and how journalists had to improvise suddenly, both in newsrooms as well as freelancers. That it was sudden, and we were not prepared to respond to that. Something unknown can happen, and I think

journalists generally, especially foreign correspondents, are more prepared for that. We saw in our networks as well, that foreign correspondents or journalists were covering different cities, like Nash, freelancers who were covering different parts of a certain country.

They were able to respond more quickly. If they were covering health that week, they were able to go back and change the beat and cover COVID-19 more quickly. Most of the foreign correspondents and war correspondents have been able to still cover COVID-19, as well as simultaneously cover political crises. That is probably linked to the preparedness element that journalists were used to covering new beats and going to new places and preparing themselves. They were quickly able to respond and equip themselves, even while we were still going through confusion about what to do, how to keep yourself safe and so on, because there was a lot of lack of information about how journalists could cover the news. A lot of newsrooms in the beginning were resistant of sending reporters out, especially in the Western countries.

In some parts of the world, we see that newsrooms are deliberately sending reporters, especially freelancers, out without equipment and resources. I think that preparedness is something that is very visible. As an industry, we need to ask ourselves anything can happen. Political turmoil can happen anytime. Health crises can happen anytime, are we prepared to improvise, and still be able to do our job? Depending on the experience of organizations, we've also noticed that organizations that have been more equipped to work in diverse areas were able to quickly respond as well. They quickly went online or were able to introduce technology to keep their reporters connected and safe. There are a few things that we learned in terms of mental health. Again, it comes back to preparedness. When COVID-19 happened, we launched a map on our website that you can see on our COVID-19 InFocus page, which is @womeninjournalism.org.

The map shows women journalists reporting from different parts of the world who were on the frontline reporting on COVID-19. What we did is we also connected a lot of reporters regionally, as well as globally. Through these connections, we were able to bring reporters to share advice and what they were doing on the ground and how they were staying safe on the ground. Being connected with other reporters not only helped with information and logistical information, being able to share resources and advice, but also worked as a great support system for women reporters who were facing anxiety. I do want to say that like Dr. Anthony Feinstein mentioned about newsrooms, we need to have mental health support. We've done a lot of new things in the industry.

We started having journalism unions when we saw labour issues inside of newsrooms. We introduced other training for reporters who were on the frontline when reporters were going and covering wars. I think now we are at a time where every newsroom needs to have mental health support, and journalism unions need to have mental health supports for freelancers. Press clubs need to have mental health support resources for freelancers. I think all journalists around the world are working in very precarious environments and we need to be equipped to support them. Otherwise, I think it's really half and half. Journalists who don't have mental health support cannot do their job properly. The other thing I want to mention is that the reality of the industry is that journalism is going through a financial crisis as well.

The business model is not working, especially when combined with parts of the world where there are political regimes trying to censor and spread misinformation. Journalism is suffering because of that as well. And there is also a financial crisis. On the ground, a reporter, whether they are a freelancer or a staff reporter, they may be in a country where they do not have access to mental health support and cannot afford doctors. We work on this issue every day. We offer mental health support to reporters. Sometimes this is pro bono and sometimes paid, but we obviously are short or out of resources. What do you do in the situation where a reporter cannot access mental health support or therapy? One other alternative that really comes into play that we have seen in the last few years in the Coalition for Women in Journalism is support networks for women journalists or journalists in general. They need to be connected to each other and be able to support each other as well.

Because at the end of the day, it's about being able to share your stress, trauma, anxiety, creativity, challenges, or moral injury, that is a huge part of not being able to cover the story that a lot of journalists are facing right now. When journalists have someone to talk to and a mentor or someone to connect with, to be able to express themselves about their challenges in the field or in their personal lives or both, they will be in a much better place to be able to do their job as well.

Matthew Pearson: Thank you so much. Let's just pick up on the last point that we just heard about newsroom resources that Kiran was making, and maybe we can give a thumbs up or thumbs down about do we think that the industry's resources availability and trying to do everything with limited resources will continue, or will we see re-investment in newsrooms to ensure staff don't burnout? Are we going to continue to see resource cuts? Because the industry's bottom line has been so hard hit, or might this be a time for reinvestment given that staff are burned out? What do folks think quickly? And then I want to go to one final wrap up question for everyone.

Kiran Nazish: I would say I think it's both. Depending on the place and the country. Because we were looking at different parts of the world, so I would say that journalism is going to be affected by any given country by how they are doing things, and the journalism industry is going to get affected in that way. I think that in some countries we are seeing a lot of collaboration between organizations. Journalism is inherently a competitive industry, but we're seeing with COVID-19 a lot of political crises and censorship, and we're seeing journalism as an industry coming together. There's a lot more connectivity and resources. People are aware and willing to fund good journalism, but in some parts of the world, I think it's still going to be a challenge.

Matthew Pearson: Jane, in British Columbia, do you think that we're going to see news organizations level up and put in more money, or are you worried that it's going to continue to slide?

Jane Seyd: At this point, I don't think many news organizations have more money to put in. So of course, that is a big problem. I don't believe we'll really know until after we see the end of this pandemic what's going to happen. I know there isn't a lot of spare cash to go around or actually any cash to go around. I think that when people see journalists being able to do more with less, that tends to be a situation that they want to continue, but there are limits to that. You have a limited ability to keep and attract good people if you can't have decent working conditions. I think that

obviously all news organizations are desperately looking for a new business model that works because the situation we're in right now isn't sustainable.

Matthew Pearson: Thank you. Before we go, I have one last question that I would like to put to each of you. It was a line from Jane's story on March 9th, where she interviewed the daughter of the first Canadian who died of COVID. The line that struck me, was the daughter said, "the goodness in people isn't forgotten in this, little acts of kindness are everything." This afternoon we have covered some difficult terrain. If it's possible, I'd love to conclude on a hopeful note, as you four think about journalists working tirelessly to cover this pandemic, often under less than ideal circumstances, what has given you a moment of pause and hope?

Dr. Anthony Feinstein: We are an adaptable species. That's why we have survived to the twenty-first century. We learned how to adapt through crises, and we will continue to do that. While I'm aware of all the loss and the suffering, that surrounds us, I'm also aware of people's creativity and adaptability to how things are changing. And when the dust settles, when we emerge from this long dark period in our history, we will come into a different world. We will be doing certain things that are different, that are better. I see aspects of my clinical practice that have improved. We've learned to perfect virtual connection.

I see how my patients with neurological disability, in fact, I prefer working remotely, then having to come into the hospital. That I don't have to navigate traffic or spend a lot of money on parking or walk that long, horrible hospital corridor. The model of medical care is going to change in some ways for the better. All of this trauma, we see things evolving in a positive way because that's who we are as a species. That's how we survive. You see creativity that will transform medical practice in many ways for the better.

Matthew Pearson: Thank you, creativity. Okay Kiran would you like to go now?

Kiran Nazish: I just wanted to say thank you. That's a great point. One of the things that we also saw was that journalists were resilient and they were creative. Journalists were constantly thinking during this crisis and they have really come back to improvise and find alternative ways to be able to survive and do new things. We have seen that generally, and systematically as well. There's a lot more creativity.

Creativity, in fact, is one of the things that I had noted. I didn't have time to go into it, but there are several examples of how we've seen a lot of mental health issues, trauma and panic attacks, and anxiety and the financial crisis. But one of the most beautiful things is that we've seen journalists coming out creatively and doing new things and finding new ways of connecting to their work. And so that's certainly something that I think we will be able to learn and be able to improvise and something good that came out of this crisis.

Matthew Pearson: Thank you, Kiran. Chad, obviously unspeakably difficult times in Lebanon, but I wonder if there has, when you think about journalists and the work that they've done, you called them superheroes earlier. Is that what gives you hope? Is there something that gives you hope?

- Jad Shahrou:** Do you know what Matthew? I was very moved. I had a lot of feelings when you read the sentence from Jane's article, because for me, maybe for the public or for the attendees that are just watching or listening to two different experiments or experiences talking about what kind of struggles and crisis that the journalism world is facing now. But for me, this is one of the best treatments for me, just sharing my feelings, sharing my experience in Lebanon with other journalists at the other side of the earth. It's one of the greatest treatments for us in Lebanon.
- I was just sharing what is happening in Lebanon, but for me, it's like a medical treatment and I need to talk about it, and I need to raise my voice to let all the world know about it, because this is the only way to get rid of this and to face such a struggle by talking about it. To take it from the local, to the public, to the regional, to the world, and to let people know that they are not only by themselves facing such a struggle.
- It makes me sad that we are in this situation, but it gives me some kind of support to know that some of my troubles are common with what others have said, and what Jane said, and to re-watch and or to meet Dr. Feinstein, because I have already read his comments on how to protect our mental health and put it on our website and had it translated into Arabic. And now I'm discussing it with him live with you and the attendees. I think it's a very productive experience for me. I think it's one of the most wonderful moments for me to talk about what we are facing in Lebanon.
- Matthew Pearson:** Thank you for sharing that. Hearing you speak reminded me of a lyric by a Canadian singer called Bruce Cockburn, and it goes, "you have to kick at the darkness until it bleeds daylight." So, this idea of talking about it, Jane, maybe we'll close with you. What is your moment there in British Columbia?
- Jane Seyd:** One thing that this whole crazy situation has brought home to me is that journalism matters and news matters. I think we've seen hopeful signs in the community in general, in terms of their ability to step up and help one another, their ability to adapt. We've also seen people coming forward to help journalists. When the whole thing hit, we had a voluntary subscription drive, and we did have readers step up and offer money to keep us going until we could get back on our feet. And I found a high level of engagement with the public and with readers and with people who are keen to get information and to help us get information. That has been really heartening to experience. I was having trouble with some freedom of information requests, and I was conversing with a woman who was talking about a totally different topic.
- And she said, "Well, I'm a lawyer and I deal with that. Maybe I can help you out." Things like that have been happening during this strange pandemic. People really wanted the information. They wanted to know what was going on in their community, in their country and the rest of the world. They were hungry for it. And they were depending on us to find out that information for them. And they still are. We all get regular texts, emails, messages, saying, "Hey, can you ask this question or I want to know this." It makes me hopeful about our profession in terms of its importance. One of the things that I like to try and do, and I know that others do as well is to acknowledge when people have been doing really good work. If I read a

story that I think is amazing, I try to let that writer know because I know how hard it is to do our work. And I think it's really important for us to acknowledge that and to support each other as well.

Matthew Pearson: Well, we kept folks a little longer than the time allotted, but I think that last moment in particular, was a really beautiful way to wrap up. Dr. Anthony Feinstein, Kiran Nazish, Jane Seyd and Jad Shahrour, I thank you all so much for joining us today. I thank you for the work that you do, and will continue to do, and we've benefited so much from your wisdom today, all the best to everyone of you.



JOURNALISM IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

COVERING THE PANDEMIC SAFELY

PANEL

Moderator: Allan Thompson, Carleton University
Speakers: Erin Ailworth, *Wall Street Journal*; **Adrienne Arsenauff**, CBC News;
Sefania Battistini, RAI News; **Paula Fray**, Frayintermedia

Allan Thompson: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Allan Thompson. I am the program head at the School of Journalism at Carleton University and host of this two-day symposium Journalism in the Time of Crisis. This is the panel on Covering the Pandemic Safely. First of all, I would like to acknowledge that Carleton University in Ottawa is situated on the unceded and unsundered territory of the Algonquin Nation.

For our discussion today, we're joined by four veteran journalists who have all been thrust into pandemic coverage. Stefania Battistini is a broadcaster for the Italian station RAI News. Stefania has been covering the coronavirus pandemic in Lombardy, Northern Italy, one of the hardest hit regions in the world, and a place where COVID cases are, again, spiking.

Adrienne Arsenault is a senior correspondent with CBC News and has been a co-host of *The National* since November of 2017. In September, she won the News and Documentary Emmy Award for her coverage of the Ebola virus epidemic in Liberia. I know for many of our students, Adrienne is the face of Canadian foreign reporting.

Erin Allworth writes about the Mid-West out of the Chicago bureau of the *Wall Street Journal*. She's covered hurricanes, wildfires, and other disasters and traumas nationwide, and now COVID-19. When we spoke earlier this week, she showed me the workspace she has converted into a storage unit for her pandemic coverage supplies.

Finally, Paula Fray is a South African journalist, entrepreneur and media development trainer. She was the first female editor of South Africa's *Saturday Star* newspaper. In 2005, she founded a private company, Frayintermedia, of which she's the CEO, to improve journalistic standards. That work has involved her in training African journalists to cover COVID.

Our focus is on how journalists can cover the pandemic safely. I've asked our panellists to talk about the logistics of doing that, what has been involved, how it changes the way you do your work, and how it changes the journalism.

I've done a little bit of hostile-environment reporting myself, and have taught on journalism and conflict, and how, in wartime, it can change the reporting. We sense the pressure to be on the team. We're part of the war effort. A journalist often gets dragooned into the war effort when we have troops deployed.

So how does that translate in a pandemic? Are we supposed to be supporting the war effort, so to speak, against the enemy? Or is it even more important than ever for us to be critical, to find fault when fault exists?

Most of all, I have asked our panellists to speak from their personal experience. How has the pandemic changed your journalism? How has it changed journalism, your reporting, your ability to tell the story?

I think we will begin with Stefania. I have asked each of our panellists if they could speak for 10 minutes about their experience. Then, we'll have time to compare notes and have a discussion. I'll be watching the Q&A panel and you'll have a chance to pose a question. Stefania, if you could go ahead, please.

Stefania Battistini: Good afternoon. First of all, I'm delighted to be with you today, and share my opinion and listen to yours. I'm a reporter for RAI, the Italian public broadcaster, and I've been covering the pandemic in Italy since the first day, in particular, in Lombardy in Northern Italy, one of the hardest hit regions in the world.

The purpose of my speech is to talk about a new kind of risk linked to my profession. When it comes to risk linked to COVID-19 in journalism, we should wonder which kind of risk we are going to take. That's not about death only, but let's start with health, because we risk coming down with a virus doing our daily routine.

In Italy, the pandemic started officially on February 22nd. Actually, on the 21st at midnight when the medical staff, with great insight, decided to swab a young man named Mattia Maestri, 38 years old, who became well-known as patient number one, who had just run a marathon and he was apparently healthy. In fact, he had a COVID-19 bilateral interstitial pneumonia. That day, without being aware of it, the way of doing journalism totally changed. I'd like to sum up these changes.

First of all, practical changes. We began to wear masks and gloves all day long, using ropes to lengthen mics and respect social distances on a daily basis. You know very well what it means entering a hospital for a journalist who works every day in the field. At the end of March, we entered a COVID hotel where there were still positive patients being released from hospitals.

We had to wear clothes that were uniforms, as if we had to protect ourselves from a bacteria attack. They are the same as those used inside an infectious disease ward in case of Ebola. Double gloves, rubber boots, double masks to protect our eyes. But we got used to it. Now it's a daily routine. In my opinion, the real issue at this moment is that companies must always guarantee and stock PPE, personal protective equipment.

Looking for the truth in some places became dangerous. The second item, we are obliged to chase news and truth, or I should say different kinds of truth, in sites where the aggressiveness of the virus was, and still is, higher, such as hospital morgues, cemeteries and so on. You are always aware of the great number of military tanks removing coffins because the crematoria were no longer able to keep up with them.

In one video at the end of March, there was a long queue, the famous queue of military tanks removing 65 coffins from the cemetery of Bergamo. This took place before the eyes of Bergamo citizens who were totally unaware of the situation. It was a great shock. It was even tough to tell it.

We discovered this image on Twitter the day before, so we tried to find evidence. We called the Institutional Services, the Army and the mayor to understand what was going on. This particular image has become the symbol of a tragedy lived in North Italy. I can't hide from you that someone tried to say that it was inappropriate to disclose those images because they would upset children, triggering panic. That kind of pressure didn't get, obviously, any results.

One month later, in Bergamo, there were still military tanks removing coffins from a church. The military were wearing white uniforms similar to those used to protect oneself from a bacteria attack.

The third point is difficult reporting. The need to protect ourselves so much has decreased the space of inquiry about power. Definitely the space for investigative journalism, especially for those who work in the frontlines, is increasingly restrictive for several reasons.

Number one, authorizations. It's more and more difficult to access the places where a lighthouse should be lit, and where we should be making inquiries. It's getting harder and harder to verify situations with your own eyes. For example, today, an authorization is required to enter a hospital. More and more often regional governors, whom our health care depends on, are likely to deny this permission and prevent medical staff from being interviewed. The excuse of infection risk is becoming a means to ban entry, and this is really, really worrying here in Italy.

In one case, we had to sneak into a hospital in the Bergamo area where a local outbreak started. A nurse told us at the end of March, "We are on our knees. Patients are dying all the time. We are forced to make choices. We chose who to treat, and who not." That happened because of exhausted oxygen helmets, and a lack of beds in intensive care.

This point about authorization is today trickier and trickier with a lot of pitfalls. It's getting more and more difficult to ask questions because of the danger of getting infected. For example, in Lombardy, the governor is accused of favouring his family business in the sale of white coats during the emergency.

During the lockdown, it was difficult to ask questions because journalists couldn't physically go into the press room. But at the same time, they were forced to listen to a one-way communication, with no possibility of interacting with a crisis unit in the region. It was impossible to ask about white coats. The pandemic has given politicians a great chance to get around direct questions. So, on the pretext of the risk of infection, it's forbidden to enter the place that we have to investigate.

For example, the Bergamo public prosecutor office is investigating a hospital where many positives were found in February. At first, the emergency room was immediately closed. But after three hours, was ordered reopened. On second thought, we can say that this behaviour has contributed, remarkably, to ensure Bergamo was one of the deadliest places in Europe. While I was walking around hospital to get answers, a physician, asking for anonymity, told me that it was politics that decided, ordering the reopening despite the opposition of doctors and virologists.

This account of the facts was later found by the prosecutor's office. I shall tell you the enormous pressure I faced to make me disclose the name of the source, and the insults from the politicians claiming that sources with a COVID case couldn't be used in a news report. However, this is a well-known dynamic even before COVID. And two hours ago, on the news, that person who decided to reopen the hospital is officially under investigation. This is the big problem we have to face during these months.

The last item is connected with deaths. It's trickier and trickier to talk to sources guaranteeing anonymity. In addition, during lockdown, there were fewer journalists. It was almost impossible for freelance journalists to get permission to move around

the country. In my point of view, fewer journalists means fewer watchdogs. That's to say, democratic deficits. And this is also the danger also,

Allan Thompson: Thanks, Stefania. It makes me realize, listening to your presentation, how much all of these topics are interwoven. Over the course of two days, we have panels on mental health issues. We have panels, like this one, on the safety of journalists. We had a panel this morning on the role of a watchdog versus being a megaphone for the government. And we have another panel this afternoon on press freedom and the restrictions on press freedom in the name of COVID. And you've touched on all of those things in one presentation.

Now let's go to Adrienne and then we'll proceed from there.

Adrienne Arseneault: Thank you, Allan. I just want to mention, you talked about an Emmy in September. It was a September, not this one. It was quite a few years ago. If we'd had an Ebola outbreak as well as COVID, I think I just would have crawled into bed and taken a pass on the rest of 2020. But that Ebola experience has been personally very, very helpful in this.

And Stefania, listening to you, it reminds me of how much of the reporting in the early days from Italy really informed how people oceans away felt. And the sober reporting, the frank doctors. I remember those stories about doctors having to make decisions about who to save. That rippled across the world. It landed in newsrooms, and it landed in living rooms, and it sort of set the tone for what was all coming to us. I think part of why people took COVID so seriously, certainly in Canada, in the early days is, in part, because of what we learned from your experience. And I think that has been an interesting journalistic phenomenon of COVID, watching the lessons ripple across the planet.

You talked about February 22nd as being a key date for you, 21st or 22nd. For us, it was March 9th. That was when Canada recorded its first COVID-19 death. And then things moved very quickly here. For the Canadians listening, you know this. Humour me going through the timeline here. It was March 11th when the WHO declared the pandemic. One of the weirdest days I've certainly ever encountered for the way the energy and tone shifted. The program I work for, *The National*, our first show is live on the air at 9:00 p.m. In the course of one hour, Trump declared the travel ban. We knew the pandemic had just been declared. The NBA cancelled its season. Tom Hanks announced that he had COVID. It was a day when the penny dropped for a lot of people.

I was on a plane the next morning to Johns Hopkins because, in terms of the world of learning about COVID, Johns Hopkins had run a simulation in October 2019 on a fictional coronavirus and how the world would respond. And they invited airlines and hotels, and directors of CDCs around the world. And so, listening to Dr. Eric Toner talk, who ran the simulation, he, like the reporting in Italy, set the course for what was coming. "Service industries may very well collapse. You will see a surge in bankruptcies. The airlines won't be able to handle it. There will be pushback against public health measures. There will be xenophobia. There will be stigmatization of the sick." It was a horrifying conversation, but it was very clear that this was coming.

And so, for people in the early days, the obsession here initially was about touch, I'm sure everyone recalls that. Again, Stefania, the way you talked about it, our microphones were on these very long sticks. Everything was washed down. The Ebola protocols that we needed in Liberia in 2014 were brought out and spread to everyone. One of the things we learned then was that you practice not moving your hands above your shoulders, because then they get to your face. So, everybody was walking around trying not to move their hands above their shoulders. Gloves, wiping everything down, not travelling in the same vehicle, all of those protocols came into place.

And immediately, we saw what you saw, Stefania. Which is, this is a profession where people are hardwired to get close. And we had to be far apart. And there is a detachment with distance that was, and continues to be, very tricky. It goes against every impulse of a journalist. You just want to get in close and listen to people, and we can't. Therefore it became very hard to tell these stories.

Visually, COVID is a very difficult story to tell. It is actually a print story. And I see Stefania agreeing. It is very hard to show endless pictures of empty buildings, masks and people from behind glass. Bringing people closer in the storytelling has been very difficult for us, and I think we're still learning how to do it.

We're also realizing that there's been a journalistic transformation. And as hungry as people were in the very beginning, because this was so new, to get a sense of how other countries were faring, "What are Italy's numbers today?" for example, when the virus came to everyone else's country, the focus shifted. In Canada, it became a domestic concern, and very quickly became a hyper-local one.

If the Canadians listening think about their own viewing patterns, when the prime minister used to deliver these news conferences every day at 11:00 a.m., everyone would watch, because this was a Canadian story. And then, suddenly it became very hard to program, because the premiers were all jumping on with their own news conferences. The story then became a provincial one. And within the provinces it became regional. And then the mayors were getting involved. And then we had data about postal codes. And now we're at the granular level of talking about particular spin studios or particular weddings in tiny towns. It has become so hyper-local, which is, journalistically, a very hard thing to keep a handle on.

Where we're at in terms of that now is that hyper-local rules in terms of people's interest, with going back to what's happening in the rest of the world for solutions. People are struggling with the traumas in the rest of the world, but they really want to know the good ideas for keeping restaurants safe. Erin is in Chicago. Chicago has a great design competition about how to keep outdoor restaurants functioning, right down to inventing, and some people have the protocols for it, heated tablecloths that drape across the diners. People now are not looking to the rest of the world for a sense of scale about COVID. They're looking for a sense of solution. So, in terms of our audience, that's what we understand that they want.

But the physicality for the journalist is something we worry about a lot. And as much as I think we have a handle on keeping people physically safe, it's the mental space that I'm particularly worried about for all of our teams. I think you

become a journalist for a whole bunch of reasons. Sometimes you become a TV journalist because you love the team element of it, the idea of working together and collaborating. And the place is empty. There's maybe four of us in here. It is really hard to separate people. And the isolation is starting to have an effect. And I think managers and all of us have to work harder at reaching out to our colleagues, because you can get super dark.

If you pass somebody in a hallway, you get a sense of what their life at home has been like. Has it been a hard day with the kids? Are they struggling with their parents? What's going on? Now it has to be a purposeful conversation. People are going through deaths or marriages or babies being born, and your colleagues don't know, or aren't there for you. This is something we are working with.

The show I host is with a colleague, Andrew Chang. Normally I'm close enough that I could stick my finger in his eye when we host a show. Obviously, that didn't happen. I spent two weeks doing the program from my backyard while he was in the studio. It was an okay solution until the cameraman, masked up, gloved up, had to chase a skunk off the deck in the middle of the show. And it became clear that, just one of many reasons, why that wasn't a good idea.

We decamped to a condo, my cameraman and I. And that's where we both worked and lived a lot of times, when we spent times in ICUs and emergency rooms with COVID patients and the rate of exposure was unclear. Or we did ride-alongs with paramedics, and again, the rate of exposure was unclear. We just kept to ourselves as a tiny unit. We aren't making plans here, journalistically and logistically, more than a few weeks at a time, because you develop one protocol, and then it changes. And there is a rule-following fatigue that comes with that.

We, too, have encountered the same problems, Stefania, that you have, whereas COVID is covered. COVID lets dictators dance, and dictators don't have to rule countries. They can sometimes rule businesses and industries, as well. And so, this has required a huge push from our investigative units. Long-term care has been a horror in this country. We have huge problems, and we are starting to unearth a lot of what we should have figured out a long time ago as a country. So that is a big area of focus for us.

And I would say, journalistically too, this has been a striking time for the data journalists in our midst. Numbers, trends, visualization of those matter more in ways that I'm not sure they ever have. It is bizarre to think that people wake up and ask, "What are the numbers today?" And we all know what they're talking about. We have to understand which numbers are useful, which ones are no longer useful. But they need help visualizing that, and that is an area we're trying to focus on.

We're still finessing how we handle this every day. So far, for CBC, we have had a few cases of people contracting COVID. We don't believe it's been through work. People have handled it for the most part pretty well. Knock on wood. But we know we have a long road ahead. And again, Italy, we are looking to you, again, as Lombardy and the rest go through it again. We're watching, and grateful for your coverage.

Allan Thompson: Thanks, Adrienne. Again, like Stefania, you've touched on a whole bunch of issues that are coming up in this two-day period. And we'll come back to the detachment of

distance, what that means to try to report. Hyper-local, interesting you point to how more and more of the stories are what's happening in your own neighbourhood and around the corner. And yet, those are the media outlets that have been devastated by COVID and were already on their last legs. And so, there's that dynamic.

The journalism fatigue. We had some really interesting data this morning from Richard Fletcher at Reuters. Trust in media and use of media, of course, spiked early on, in March and April. And then it started to go back to normal levels. People were losing interest. Now other stories, Black Lives Matter, other major international stories, again, came back onto the news agenda.

If somebody knows the Italian word for skunk, maybe you could put it in the question field, so that I can pass it on to Stefania, because I'm not sure when Adrienne referred to the skunk confronting her cameraman, if that translated.

In any event, Erin, if you could join us now and share your presentation.

Erin Allworth:

Hello all. So, I have not been back to the office since mid-March. I haven't worked with all of my colleagues since then. As you see behind me is the guest room closet that I converted into my office space and gear closet. You'll see some of my hard hats and my fire helmet and my masks back there. I cover disasters regularly. I actually came to the pandemic from major flooding in Mississippi. And right before the pandemic started, I actually handled a mass shooting and a police shooting.

When we saw this starting to hit outside of China, starting to hit Italy and elsewhere in Europe, I basically turned to a colleague. And we're both preppers, and we said, "Gear up?" "Gear up." And we basically went to all the hardware stores where I normally buy the N95s that I usually just have to use for wildfires. We bought as many of the N95s as we could find. I started adding Tyvek suits, and booties to cover my shoes in case I needed to go to a hospital or go somewhere where infection was prevalent.

I didn't really know how to cover the spread of disease, so I initially called Granger, which is a medical supply company and basically said, "Help. What do I do? What do I need?" "I'm a journalist, and I know I'm going to need to tell this story. How do I do it?" And they very kindly walked me through what to buy, including medical grade sanitation wipes, what percentage of alcohol I needed in my hand sanitizer, all of that kind of stuff.

So, a lot of my job covering disaster, and this very much applies to the pandemic, is about logistics, and how to safely outfit myself so that I can still do on-the-ground reporting, which we are continuing to do in certain circumstances. We're being much more selective about that, but it's about knowing, essentially, what to wear. What to bring with me beyond my notepad, my cell phone and my laptop.

That's become even more important as we've started to cover other types of stories on top of the pandemic. Right now, George Floyd is my story. Jacob Blake and Kyle Rittenhouse are my story. The alleged plot to kidnap the Michigan governor, that's my story. And I've got to go out and be on the ground for all of those. So, it's remembering that when I pack things like my gas mask for a riot, that I have also got to bring my N95s or this nice little mask, which is like a step up, it's a P100. And then remembering

to also take all the hand sanitizer and wipes so that I can clean that stuff off and keep myself safe. Just for daily reporting, one of these usually gets me through.

Gearing up, the extra gear, is something I had to learn. And then after that, it was figuring out how to connect with people if I couldn't be on the ground. I mean, disaster reporting is so much about being in a place and witnessing whatever destruction or trauma or event is happening, as well as connecting with people in those places. We haven't always been able to do that in this instance because it hasn't always been safe.

And so, learning how to use platforms like this, like Zoom, like Google Hangouts, like Skype to conduct video interviews that let me see someone's environment, let me see their hand gestures, let me witness their emotion if they start to cry or tear up. Or their face scrunches up in anger. All of those things help me do what I might do in person. It's not as good, but it's something.

Also learning how to follow the paper trail even more. Or how to ask for documentation so that you can verify things that you might otherwise normally be able to see or witness in person. So, if someone has told me that they're sick, but I can't see that they're sick, I can ask, "Did you go to the hospital? Did you talk to a doctor? Do you have a medical record that I might be able to see?" And I find that telling people, "Hey, listen. I'm not going to necessarily publish your personal information, but this just helps me verify that these things happened." "Listen, it's not that I distrust you, but there are people out there who don't always tell the truth, and so I have to ask this of everyone."

But also, aside from medical documents, it's also asking people things such as, "Hey, do you have a photo or a video? Hey, people who were on the cruise ships that got coronavirus, did you happen to take a vacation video? I would love to see it." It helps you rebuild those critical moments. Do the reporting, even when you can't be there.

I think those are two of the biggest changes that I've experienced. The third is that I'm stuck here, by myself. I live by myself. Well, I live with my dog. She's very cute. But she's not a human being. And on top of that, when I come back from reporting, if I have been in the field, I'm still in the middle of a crisis. Before this year, if I went to a wildfire or a hurricane or a mass shooting, when I came home, I was out of the disaster zone. I had time to breathe and recharge and emotionally recover. Now, I come back from riots in Minneapolis and Wisconsin, and instead of being able to step back, I'm still in the middle of a pandemic.

I think we need to be very conscious as we do this work that it's so much harder to do the necessary self-care that comes with this reporting. I've started talking to a psychologist more. I reach out to my colleagues more. Because we need to be able to talk about this and connect with people, even if we can't do that connecting in person. We need to acknowledge that this is stressful, traumatizing work. Not just for the people that we are reporting on, but for us. And I think I'll leave it there.

Allan Thompson:

Thank you very much. And Erin, you reminded me of the importance of training. You have come to this kind of reporting with a significant amount of training, experience, equipment, the wherewithal for the four different types of masks that you've deployed.

Now let's proceed to Paula, who worked as a reporter, as a journalist, but also now comes to this from the point of view of somebody involved on the training side. I think that's a good segue from Erin.

Paula Fray:

Thank you very much, Allan. It's really been useful to be listening to everyone speak about their experiences, because I think that a lot of what we've learned during the pandemic is how much we need to be listening to other people's experiences and learning from what they've been able to do.

I'm based in Johannesburg, South Africa, and at the moment, this country has just over 708,000 confirmed cases. We've got about 18,656 confirmed deaths. Although, obviously, we think it might be much higher than that. And we literally are just slightly less than half of the entire continent's COVID cases. I mean, we've got 1.6 million confirmed cases in Africa. We've got about 38,000, almost 39,000 deaths. You can see that South Africa really has borne the brunt of the pandemic today. I mean, part of it might be that our counting is much better. But certainly, we know that the case load here has been very high.

In early March, long before the first South African was reported positive, we brought together many journalists to think about what the lessons were that we could learn from our own experience of reporting on HIV and Ebola. And we brought health editors from across the continent, and an epidemiologist who had actually worked in West Africa with the Ebola crisis.

One of the things that we realized is that a pandemic is never just about health. One of the reasons why we wanted to have that conversation was because I think all of us were just aware that Africa's fragile health systems really made us very vulnerable to an epidemic like this. There was a lot of concern about how we report this, and how we make sure that we report it quickly and properly.

So, early in the pandemic, there was a lot of discussion. There was a lot of thinking about the lessons to be learned. We worked with media houses to train journalists on how to use PPE, on how to sanitize the equipment. We helped media houses shift from the power mics to boom mics to using selfie sticks when recording. And generally looking at how do we practice physical distancing while producing intimate journalism?

And here's the difficulty and the challenge, that when we talk about safety for journalists on the continent, Africa also saw a huge shift to online news. There were huge numbers, large increases in the number of people who were getting their news online. When you have 60 percent of the population that doesn't have access to the internet, when it's not possible to get the human stories by having a Zoom interview or a WhatsApp call, or an SMS, then how do you actually tell the story of what's really happening on the ground?

What it really meant was that many journalists had to get out of lockdown, had to go into communities where there was overcrowding, where there was a lack of physical distancing, where there was a lack of basic resources, whether it's sanitation, clean water and so on. And for many of the journalists who we were training, the reality was that as soon as communities saw them come in, there was such an eagerness to have the story and the difficulties reflected in mainstream media, that all discussion

of physical distancing just went out of the window. I mean, if you're in a crowded community where people are queuing for food, how do you physically distance? When people see a camera being lifted, and they desperately want their story to be told, how do you physically distance?

And I think one of the big issues that I really want to touch on today is that COVID-19 was much more than just a health story, and it is still much more than a health story. It's a finance story. It's a political story. It's a gendered story. It's a corruption story in many parts of Africa. And what COVID-19 actually did was to expose South African societal fault lines. It amplified the country's extremely high levels of inequality that aligns with access to resources.

And it exposed it, not only to the general public, but also in newsrooms. Very often you had better resourced media being able to provide their journalists with PPE and provide them with internet access, as opposed to other media, that basically expected journalists to be able to keep themselves safe and to provide their own data for internet access. I've heard many stories of journalists who suddenly found themselves at the table, at the diary meeting, at the discussions, because they had access to the internet. And many journalists who worked from a newsroom, suddenly find themselves being excluded from those conversations and those decision-making processes.

So, in South Africa and in large parts of Africa, and probably around the globe, middle-class knowledge workers were largely able to continue working from home. But it's the poor who were absolutely devastated. Early in the pandemic in South Africa, two out of three poor people could not afford food because the lockdown really prevented them from being able to go out and earn a daily wage. And so, the poor were devastated. And the only way to tell the story was not by phoning them. Not by SMSing them, or WhatsApping them, but actually going out there into overcrowded communities and actually telling that story.

We have had issues of newsrooms, of bureaus, having to close down and have deep cleaning because there's been an outbreak of COVID. And unfortunately, we have also had really serious illnesses, people being hospitalized, journalists being hospitalized, and unfortunately, also death. And so, the challenge really, because fundamentally, this is what journalism is about, isn't it, that we tell the stories, we amplify the voices, of people who are marginalized.

I wanted to end this discussion, certainly, on a more positive note. Because one of the things that I realize is that our experience with HIV and Ebola meant that we actually had better trained health reporters who recognized the need for the science, who recognized the need to deal with the misinformation really early. South Africa has an experience with misinformation around HIV that led to unnecessary death before we took anti-retrovirals seriously. So, journalists were more cautious about following the science.

This was one of our difficulties. In the initial stages of the pandemic, some of those things were changing. Information had been verified. In the initial stages, masks weren't necessarily being encouraged. Later on, we realized that, in fact, they did help to minimize it. I think that's one of the things that we learned, we had really good experience about covering an epidemic that we actually used it in the process.

The second thing that was really positive, and it came out of a really difficult situation, when I told you about how journalists, in the beginning, were having to go out into communities, that instilled real fear on two levels. One is that personal risk, which you take going out, the personal risk to yourself. But there was a greater mental health impact on the risk you were bringing back to your family. That you were going out to tell a story, but the real danger that you were bringing COVID back into your home, that was one thing.

And the second thing, there was an ethical risk. Because journalists were essential workers, we were allowed to move around. So, there was obviously the risk that we might expose ourselves to COVID and take it to another community as we moved from community to community. So those were the really critical things that journalists had to grapple with.

But I think the positive thing that I want to amplify is that I think COVID has helped us talk about mental health in the newsroom. I've been a journalist in South Africa for more than three decades. I was here during the transition from Apartheid. We know in some ways that we have been exposed to post traumatic stress disorder. But very often we ignore the less visible post-traumatic stress disorder of covering something like HIV and AIDS. Of covering systemic or sustained crime.

I think one of the things that I've seen in the newsrooms that I've worked with is that we are now willing to talk about the mental health impact of covering the lockdown. Not just for the reporters who go out every day and the stress of that, but the newsroom manager who has to make the difficult decision that the story is worth telling and, therefore, is almost worth putting someone at risk in order to tell it.

I think that when we step back from this pandemic, we must not lose that ability to be vulnerable about our mental health status, and to recognize that journalists, particularly, need to be open about that. I'm going to leave it there. And certainly, I'd like to share some more later on in the discussion.

Allan Thompson:

Wonderful. Thank you very much Paula. You touch on the disproportionate impact of COVID. It's been very striking in North America, the disproportionate racialized impact of COVID as a story. And yet, these are stories that have to be told in the community, that do compromise safety. So, in the old journalistic metaphor, we are the ones who have to run toward the danger to do the job and to tell the story.

Our frame has been talking about how to do this safely, but the self-care, which Erin referred to directly, so I'll take that opening to ask a difficult question, and maybe Erin can start first. I am curious to know, because of the situations that you have been in, what are you doing about your own self-care and your own mental health, if you're willing to share that?

Erin Allworth:

Oh, I'm always willing to share that. I think that's one of the most important things to share as a disaster reporter. I have a psychologist. Her name's Colleen, she's very nice. I talk to her once a month. She specializes in PTSD, stress and anxiety, with an emphasis on workplace. She's worked with other journalists in the past. I think, if this is something that you do regularly, and right now it's something that we're all doing regularly, having a professional to talk to is really great. And so, I'm a big advocate for having a psychologist if you can.

Aside from that, I have a network of friends, colleagues, mentors and just non-journalism friends that I feel comfortable talking with about the stress that I'm under. And they help me release some of what I've experienced. I have a really good journalism friend who also covers disaster. So we often commiserate and just share and talk about what we're going through. I don't really talk to my parents, because, let's be honest, what I do scares them. I don't go and tell my mom, "Hey, mom. I stood on the edge of a wildfire today." She usually finds that out from Instagram. Which is probably not great, but it is what it is.

And I run. Actually, I haven't been running outside because of the pandemic. I just bought myself this handy dandy treadmill. So I run. I cook. I pet the dog a lot. She's pretty great as a stress reliever. And the other thing, I have gotten much better about telling my bosses. You're right, Paula, when you say that it's made this easier to talk about in the newsroom. Because, quite frankly, before this, I was kind of the oddball out. The girl who really likes to go to disasters and doesn't mind having to wear the PPE. And everyone just thought it was very strange.

And now, because they're all going through it with me, it's become much easier to talk about how stressed I am. How weird it feels to come out of a disaster zone and go back to normal life, and the disconnect that happens. So, I've been able to open up more to my bosses about, "Hey, listen. I just covered riots for three months straight, and the crazy, racist, reader emails that we get because of that are really emotionally traumatizing for me, and I need a break. Can we move me to some other trauma, so that I don't have to deal with the racism every single day for at least a couple of weeks?" kind of thing.

Allan Thompson: Anyone else on mental health and self-care?

Stefania Battistini: I experience the same situation that Erin talked about. And I feel the same pain. I saw a lot of pain in your eyes when you told those stories. That makes me feel better. When you see a lot of people who suffer, deaths, for example. The first month in Bergamo, the emergency number didn't manage to answer all calls, so people died at home without any kind of assistance. A lot of general practitioners didn't have tools and equipment to treat patients. There wasn't PPE and a lot of doctors and nurses died while doing their job. Hospital emergencies were overcrowded, and a lot of people weren't allowed to enter. It has been a nightmare.

It's almost impossible to share the pain and to tell the country those stories, because you have to find a balance between some institutions. We have two opposite behaviours. Some institutions had to play down the situations to avoid panic. At the same time, there were many institutions that had to emphasize the situation to raise citizen awareness. You are in the middle and you have to tell the truth. So, it's difficult to find a balance between these two opposite behaviours.

Adrienne Arseneault: Can I just jump in here as well? I think all working journalists hear echoes of their lives in everything you're all saying. For many years I was based in the Middle East. And you go to a place like Syria, and I had a routine where I'd come back and I would say to the stories that they were allowed to follow me for a little bit, but there'd be a time when I'd tell them that I needed to leave them behind.

And we relied very heavily on a couple things. One, the camaraderie of our teams, our tight, tight, teams that you're on the road with. The capacity to write out the trauma. The act of writing a story is a privilege, in that everything you feel, you give back into the story. But also, as a journalist who spent most of her career going to disasters and traumas and conflicts, we were trained for that.

What has been really hard during COVID is realizing that people didn't sign up for that, did not sign up for being faced with trauma, it came to them. It came to their local newsrooms, and it came to reporters who maybe never wanted to experience that, didn't have the training for it. The notion of a hostile environment, of coping with a hostile environment, was traditionally something that, when there was training in the newsroom, it was almost exclusively for people who were going somewhere. I think this has taught a lot of newsrooms that that training has to be applied for people every day. Whether it is a demonstration, like the one that Erin was talking about, where it gets so fraught, and so angry, and so emotional, and you feel so trapped and helpless. Or whether it is talking to an elderly woman.

One of the hardest things for me as someone who likes to think I'm okay, but one of the hardest things I did was talk to an old lady through a window, who was in a nursing home, who hadn't seen her family, and she was crying, and there wasn't a damn thing I could do about it other than to say, "I'm sure your kids love you and how proud they must be of you." I don't even know what I was saying at some point. But I couldn't get there. And I think that kind of experience is sticking with people who've never had it before. And this is what I'm truly worried about — how robust people will be after this when they just go home to themselves. It's super hard.

Paula Fray:

One of the things that I'm finding consistently is that, because a lot of the journalists are working from home, the day never ends. And the exposure to the story, to COVID-19, never ends. Before, you would go to the office and you would do your day's work, and that ride home would just be where you cut yourself off from the story that you've been covering all day. But the story never ends. You wake up in the morning, and you're doing the story. And you work all day in the same space that you're living in, and you're doing the story.

I think when it comes to self-care, it really is something that we need to be quite intentional about. If we're newsroom managers, we need to be quite intentional about checking in with our colleagues and making sure that they are in fact putting up personal boundaries in terms of when they stop working during their day.

Erin Allworth:

I want to throw out one last thought that Paula just reminded me about. And I think we've all articulated it, without actually saying it, which is that we are victims and survivors of this disaster. As journalists, we're not usually those things. We get to, again, leave at the end of the day. But we're in it.

Allan Thompson:

I have heard from some employers in terms of, will we ever go back to the way we covered stories before? Adrienne was talking about the camaraderie, meeting your colleagues in the hallway, working as a team. We can't do that during COVID. But I do wonder if news organizations might come to think, "You know, people can do this job pretty well on their own, at home, online. Maybe we could save a lot of money by not having hundreds of people in newsrooms and going out to the scene."

We're adaptive and resilient and have found ways to do these stories in difficult circumstances. Do you have any fear that some of this might become the new normal? That we can't go back to the way we used to do journalism?

Adrienne Arsenaault: Hell yeah. And I think for every reason that Stefania, Paula and Erin said. Verification, the dictators, their love of darkness. You just don't know until you go. I still believe that that phenomenon of not knowing till you go is something that we will have to fight even harder for. Now, it might be the case, there are no snacks left in here, by the way. I've looked in every drawer and we've eaten everything. It may be the case that, large newsrooms, some functions can be done from home and will continue to be done from home for a while. And maybe that's okay. I have lots of colleagues who say this is the best time of their lives. They've never had such good work-life balance.

But I think we're about to have a whole bunch of fights here about finding ways not to dip in and out of a story as frequently as we did, but going to a place and committing to it for a set amount of time, as in a pocket bureau experience, and then leaving it. There might not be this much stuff going on. Go. Then come back. I think we're going to have to change how we think of deployments.

Allan Thompson: Anyone else on that subject?

Erin Allworth: I'll say this. We're being told at *The Journal* that we're not going back to the office in any real form until at least January. And then, that that will be on a voluntary basis. And there are fears, and some celebration, about being able to work from home longer, but fears about some of our smaller locations closing because we've realized that we don't really need them. But there is also a lot of discussion about how in-person interaction is essential to news reporting operations. Not just the reporting part of it, but just the collegial newsroom feel, too. Because so many ideas come up from bumping into your colleagues and talking to them in the office. So, figuring out how, even as we evolve, to a little more separate way of working, how we keep that camaraderie going, as well.

And I will say this. It's true that I don't see most of my colleagues. But we, especially with the protest and riot coverage, work in pairs. So, it's not that I'm completely alone. I'm not deploying as a solo journalist, but it's very much being with one or two journalists. And I think that is a way that we will maintain some of those connections. But yes, we do have to think of it as that pod bureau environment and figure out how to keep ourselves safe within that.

Paula Fray: I do think, Allan, that we really have had a convergence of crises. We've got the disinformation, the misinformation crisis. We've got the economic crisis. And then we've got this pandemic. And all of these things have really come together and hit media across the African continent really, really hard. And I think it will fundamentally change the way we tell our stories. But I am concerned because one of the most obvious things is interns, union reporters. How do you learn the craft if you're not shadowing someone with more experience, if you're sitting in another environment? Zoom can only do so much.

One of the things that we need to begin to think about now are what are the safety protocols that become part and parcel of our lives? Even now, wiping your hands.

When I walk into our office, the first thing I do is take my temperature. I always have a mask on unless I'm sitting in my closed office. When I come in and out of the office, I'm using hand sanitizer. I think we really need to begin to think, journalistically, what are the protocols that we need to put in place in order to make our journalists safer?

But we cannot look at this as a long-term solution. I think part of the reason why we're doing that is financial. We know enough about COVID-19 now to be able to operate a lot more safely than we did at the beginning. But the economic imperatives are forcing us to push on in the way that we are. And I think there's a cost.

Adrienne Arseneault: Paula, can I ask you a question in terms of training and stuff? I know that in a number of industries, your point about interns is great. That people are saying that, how on earth do new hires, who have no social capital already built up, get their voices heard? How does anybody learn to trust them? How are you finding that meetings are happening? Because when you're all in person, a good leader can spot when someone is a bit shy to break in, and can say, "You look like you have something to say."

But I'm hearing from lots of people that old habits are emerging again. That people are being talked over. That there's a bit of bullying sometimes. I'm not talking about this place. I'm talking about generally in newsrooms and other high stress places that old habits are emerging. Things we thought we dealt with in the past, they just come back in COVID. So how are you talking to people who are leaders in newsrooms about how to give a voice to people who might be a bit shy about it?

Paula Fray: Very often, that's also exacerbated by the way that you have a pay-as-you-go phone, and you're putting data into your phone all the time. Or whether you have access to WiFi, and you're working from home. And so, you can actually be on the Zoom call and you can have a voice, and you can have a voice that can be talked over, if that is what's going to happen.

I think that newsroom managers, actually I've spoken to quite a number, and I think that they are aware of the fact that the distance makes it more difficult to spot when people are not feeling well, are not doing well. I think people are mindful of that. But you're right. As this becomes the new normal, we're going to find ourselves replicating the status quo from before the lockdown in the online world. And I guess I suppose it's an opportunity for us to just rethink the way we're going to do journalism in this new normal.

Stefania Battistini: One of the greatest things we lack here is the lack of data journalists. One of the challenges is to create teams of experienced journalists, and hand-on professionals. This lack, in my opinion, has contributed to the term and the rise of denial movements. Being a journalist in a social age is a great challenge, particularly in light of the growth of denial movements — rejecting science to support a rationale without providing evidence and verifying a claim. We should try to improve in Italy, data journalists who, like me, work every day in the field. I think it's a competence that I miss.

Allan Thompson: We have a panel on that this afternoon, so when you get off this one, you can check it out. We're talking about safety and the growing awareness thrust upon us of the

need for equipment, for training, self-care. But I wanted to ask you to go back and reflect on something that you've each alluded to, which is the safety concerns that we should have for those who we are covering. The trauma awareness and how do we get around that?

Adrienne, the elderly lady that you're trying to communicate with through the window, at a certain point, what's the trauma that she's experiencing? And it's inevitable, because of what we do when we're in this environment doing our work in a safe way, what about the people that we're reporting on, who are really experiencing this trauma?

Adrienne Arseneault: I think that is a very valid question. It has to be a question, it doesn't matter the story, that whoever you're talking to, the story you're sharing, it is built into the foundation of ethical journalism that the impact on them has to be considered and has to be respected.

In the case of this lady, there was a paramedic who was up in the room with her. We were doing a story on the paramedics, actually. And he was giving her a COVID test and connecting with her. And she came to the window, and that's where we had the conversation. And I knew from talking to him that she was ultimately okay. But a whole bunch of people are not okay.

We are talking to people, our journalists are talking to people, especially elderly people. This has been such a huge problem in Canada. And what worries me ethically is that we talk about them a lot, without hearing from them a lot, and that it bothers them. There are elderly people who, just because they're in a nursing home, doesn't mean they don't have the wherewithal to perfectly articulate what is happening. But there's a whole conversation happening about them, because it's too hard to get their perspective. And I think denying them a voice is as ethically problematic as the other scenario.

So, I think there are ethical challenges. There are ethical mine fields here that we hadn't considered. The act of wearing a mask in the early days, when we were being told there weren't many masks. When we went into a hospital, and the hospital didn't have enough supplies for its doctors and nurses, we sure as hell were not going to take one of their masks. So, we are sometimes issued N95s. A bit of a prepper. I think it's in the genes, just like Erin. The cameraman and I, we each had our own N95s. And I asked, "Are we okay to wear this? Will it bother anybody that we wear this here, and glasses?" "No, no, you're fine."

But I got letters like you would not believe. "How dare you, how dare you not donate that N95? How dare you wear it?" It's hard to be accused of, "How dare you go into a hospital when families can't?" Good point. But we needed to show Canadians what it was like. And the hospital wanted us there. And I tell you, the patients, the ones we were able to speak with, were certainly happy to have us there. But the letters. The ethical mine field of this is really hard to navigate.

Erin Allworth: I remind people that in these instances, they should often think of journalists like first responders. Because if we're not out there getting the information, how are they going to receive that information? How are they going to know what's going on unless someone like us is out there telling them?

I think in some ways this is about journalism awareness, in terms of those types of letters, where hey, we're not going to everything and just using N95s willy-nilly, but we are making hard decisions about what assignments absolutely need to be told in a way that will use this critical hard-to-find gear. So that's what I would say there.

On the ethical question, talking to people in person, I always hope that when I'm talking to someone who is in the middle of a trauma situation, that our conversation is going to act as a release valve for them, maybe be something a little bit cathartic. And I always have to remind myself that I have to evaluate, very quickly, whether someone is even up for talking to me, whether they have the emotional bandwidth. And if they don't, then I have to walk away, because my job is to get the story. But my job is not to add to trauma. If I'm going to add to trauma, I've got to step back. And that's okay. You can step back and go find someone else. There's going to be someone who is able to talk to you. But if someone isn't, just leave them be.

When someone *is* willing to talk to you, you've still got to do that assessment, because they might not know that they are not in the right state. You've got to ask yourself and question your gut on that. And then, even before a discussion begins, even before an interview begins, ask them for permission. Always ask for permission. And ask it a couple of times, because people, their feelings might change in the middle of a conversation.

And offer them agency, because so many of these people that we're reporting on, they've had control just ripped from them. So, you want to give them some of that control back. I do that by reminding people that I can ask lots of questions. They don't have to answer them. And that our conversation goes two ways. That if they don't think I'm asking the right thing, or headed in the right direction, that they are more than welcome to guide me there. Tell me what they think I should know.

Quite frankly, I also give people an out. And this actually helps them open up more. But I tell them, "If at any point you need to stop, or you rethink something and don't want this on the record, or if at the end of this conversation, you're just like, 'You know what? That's more than I was really expecting and I'm not cool,' you can take it back. You don't have to answer the question. We can stop, whatever it is." Because I do that, a lot of times people feel more comfortable speaking, because they know that they don't have to tell me everything if they don't want to.

Paula Fray:

One of the things that we learned from HIV and even Ebola, I think Adrienne can attest to this, is just what role journalists can play in mitigating stigma and actually stigmatizing people. Certainly, in the early days of COVID when everyone was trying to look at who was positive and who wasn't positive, I think journalists had a real ethical challenge in terms of, how do you tell the story in a way that you keep other people safe, but that you also don't contribute to stigma? I think, even now, that issue still exists, in terms of we need to be constantly thinking about whether in fact the way we're writing our story stigmatizes the protagonist in our story, or whether we're actually reducing stigma.

Allan Thompson:

We have about 10 minutes. I want to ask each of you, and maybe we'll go in the order in which we began. Stefania, you first. Hopefully this will come to an end. We're

hoping that we will reach the post-pandemic period. What do you think is the most important lesson for journalism from this period that we have just experienced?

Stefania Battistini: Just to go to the places, verify, check, tell the truth, never be seduced by power, never give up working, and stand with your boots on the ground. The same things before the pandemic, but stricter, and determined to check the news. Because it's always more and more difficult to verify with your own eyes.

The most important thing I learned is that I have to be rationale and try to listen to people, and that it's the same job as before. But I ask myself to be more rationale. When I said never give up working, and stand with your boots on the ground, for me, that has been the most difficult. Because our desk said, "Don't go there. It's dangerous. Don't do that. It's dangerous. Don't leave that situation. Beware of that." It's always no, no, no, no. It was important just to get our spaces again.

Here in Italy, the situation is getting worse because we are, like France and Great Britain, very bad with COVID, so it's not post-pandemic here. We are waiting for another wave. We feel the same here now as in May, in June. We are a little bit in the same situation.

Adrienne Arsenaault: Again, it's so nice to talk with you guys. I feel there is a chip, like a DNA thing, that is shared. And it's kind of lovely to hear about boots on the ground. And I think it means a lot to all of us.

I also think that you come out of this reminded, it's not a new learning, but you are reminded that trust is not guaranteed, but it is available. People have shown that they are prepared to trust journalism, but it has to be earned and re-earned every day. And that it comes with transparency. It comes with showing your work, not just saying, "X number of people have done this." You have to show how you got there.

And you have to continue, keep pushing the transparency, and keep bringing people into the idea that the learnings on something like COVID are changing. They're changing as the world goes through this. We will go through it with you. But just reinforcing the need to constantly earn that trust, because once it's gone, it is really hard to get back.

Erin Allworth: I think it's two things. One, a reminder not to be complacent, and to constantly be thinking about how we need to evolve or change to address whatever challenges reporting throws at us. Because I don't think any of us thought, "Gosh. A pandemic is right around the corner." I mean, I routinely go to disasters, and I thought, "Gosh, I'm prepared for pretty much everything," except a pandemic.

So just a reminder that we constantly need to be thinking, how can I do my job better? How can I do my journalism better? How can I be more empathetic, more aware of implicit bias, of telling the story properly? And how can I take that back to my newsroom and share it with my colleagues? How can I help my industry and my craft evolve so that we are constantly being the best journalists that we can in the world that we live in?

Paula Fray: Today, our health minister, who is in quarantine because he has tested positive for COVID-19, issued a statement to say that statistics are showing alarming increases

in the number of cases in one of the regions in South Africa in the Western Cape. So, because of that, I'm going to have to go with Stefania here. I think the big lesson has been that we need to be resilient. The story is not going to go away. We need to persevere. We need to stick with this. This is not short attention span journalism. This is follow-up and follow-through journalism. I'm not letting go. I think it's really important. We know the pandemic truly is a life and death situation, and I think journalists play a critical role in how citizens actually respond to it.

Allan Thompson:

I want to thank you all very much. In putting together this conference, 17 panels over the course of two days, I wanted to make sure that we touched on the question of how to cover the story safely. But even that question, obviously, kind of defies definition because it goes in all directions. And we end up talking about our own safety, the safety of those that we cover, our self-care, the ethics of doing this job, the reality that probably the most important part of this story to tell is quite likely the one that is in a community where it is likely to be the most dangerous for the journalist, and the most ethically fraught, and perhaps the most difficult to convince the news manager that we should spend time and take the time to do this.

Thanks for touching on so many issues. I want to remind you, part of the reason we're doing this in a journalism school is to share this material with journalism students and with those who are teaching journalism. In addition to those who are attending today, and now we're above 1,000 people registered for the conference, we're recording all of this. We'll be repackaging all of the panels afterwards and making them available to journalism educators because we need to draw these lessons.

Maybe the lesson is, have some of this stuff in your closet. Invest in some equipment. Invest in some training. Ask questions about how to do this job safely. Ask questions about the ethics of interviewing people who are traumatized. And know when you need to say, "I've got to take a break here. I have to step back. I cannot do this anymore, and I need some other human beings around me who can help."

Thank you very, very much for taking part. And with that, I will bring this to a close. And again, Stefania, Adrienne, Erin, and Paula, I just want to thank you so very much for joining us today.



JOURNALISM IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

SUPPORT FOR JOURNALISM AS A BUSINESS

PANEL

Moderator: Brent Jolly, Canadian Association of Journalists

Speakers: Colette Brin, Université Laval Département d'information et de communication;
Kevin Chan, Facebook; **Edward Greenspon**, Public Policy Forum; **John Honderich**, *The Toronto Star*;
Emma Gilchrist, *The Narwhal*

Brent Jolly:

Hi everybody. welcome very much to our discussion on Support for Journalism as a Business. It's a pretty newsworthy topic these days, given the general cut and thrust of the industry. My name is Brent Jolly. I'm the President of the Canadian Association of Journalists and I'm the moderator for this session.

I'm going to explain for everyone who's joining a couple of the ground rules before we get started. We have a panel of five excellent people here. They are going to be opening up with a brief three- to five-minute opening statement, which is completely free for them to take in any direction they would like. From there, we will go to a response period for five minutes, so that everybody can have a chance to respond based on what they hear from others.

Following that, we'll be have plenty of time for moderated questions. For myself, I have some questions prepared and also audience questions. I want to make sure that we have lots of time for that. So, if I could just start off, we've done a little preview in terms of picking names and who's going to go first. The winner of that contest was Mr. John Honderich. He is a businessman and the former publisher of *The Toronto Star* and he was in that role from 1994 until 2004. He's both a member of the Order of Ontario and the Order of Canada, and last year was named the Lifetime Award Recipient from the Canadian Journalism Foundation.

Next will be Colette Brin, from the University of Laval. She's the coordinator of the Canadian portion of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism's Digital Report, and she's also the Chair of the Canada Revenue Agency's Independent Advisory Board on the Eligibility for Journalists and Tax Measures and that's very timely as well.

Third up, is Emma Gilchrist, who's a reporter, editor and public speaker who co-founded *The Narwhal* in 2018. She's worked both in Canada and the United Kingdom as a journalist, and has a journalism degree also from Mount Royal University in Calgary. Next up we have Ed Greenspon, who is the president and CEO of the Public Policy Forum. And he's also the editor-at-large in Canada for Bloomberg News. He's the former editor-in-chief of *The Globe and Mail*, and the Carleton connection, he was formerly on the board of governors of the university from 2010 to 2016.

Also joining us momentarily will be Kevin Chan, who's the global director and head of public policy in Canada for Facebook. That means he's involved with interfacing with publishers, policy makers and that sort of stuff, those actors about Facebook's products and services. He also specializes in election integrity, misinformation and freedom of expression.

John seeing as you are first, I think the floor is yours now.

John Honderich:

Thank you very much, Brent. I see you introduced me as a businessman. I think I bring one or two journalistic credentials to the discussion, but I guess for my input today, I will start out our general topic in terms of the impact of the pandemic on journalism, just to give the audience some hard facts on exactly how it's affected the business of journalism. Until very recently I was involved with Torstar.

So, what I can do for the purpose of discussion, is just give you an idea of what impact the pandemic had economically and also on subscriptions. First of all, at Torstar for the first month or two of the pandemic, I can report that advertising

revenues at Torstar were down between 65 percent and 80 percent every day year over year. That was the highest level it was at. I can tell you we received quite a few public service announcement advertising from the government. In fact, at that point I can say governments on all three levels stepped up in the case of *The Star* —the city, the province and the feds— with a significant support of public service journalism information on COVID and such, which had an impact. But, as time has gone on up until August, advertising in fact has come back slightly. I can tell you when for example they opened garden centres, all of a sudden we got garden centre advertising.

But for the most part, we're still looking at declines of over 50 percent year over year in advertising revenue. It's getting a little bit better now, but still at those levels. For a business whose business model was already somewhat broken, this has been quite a catastrophic hit. Interesting that the government's support program to pay 75 percent of wages, for the employees of those companies whose revenues declined 35 percent, I can tell you that Torstar did qualify for that relief. But I know *The Globe and Mail* didn't, and I don't think *The National Post* did as well. Very interesting, and this reflects quite frankly the new dynamic about newspapers today. Seven or eight years ago I could tell you 80 percent of our revenue came from advertising, 20 percent came from circulation and indoor subscriptions.

Those numbers have not quite reversed, but we've now gotten to a point where subscription revenues in fact are the majority of our revenue. For a paper like *The Globe and Mail*, whose subscriptions are even higher, they didn't suffer a decline at all. They just suffered a decline in the advertising portion, but that wasn't enough to get it up to the 35 percent threshold. I can tell you from the point of view of *The Star*, Torstar, the only way we were eligible for that release was that, as a company, we were able to include all our community papers under Metro, and there were about 80 of them. Obviously, there's no subscription revenue there because they're given away for free, so the decline was 80 percent and it was huge. But only on that basis, were we able to qualify.

I might also add, just as a point of reference for the newspaper groups in Ontario, the now defunct, Ontario Digital Media Tax Credit, which the Ontario government brought in about a decade ago, it was meant to support the gaming industry, but newspapers were able to qualify. I can say this has been a lifesaver for the newspaper groups in Ontario. In the case of Torstar, we received \$85 million, from that subsidy. On the subscription side of the business, I can tell you that the pandemic has been very good for business. There has been huge public interest in reading about it for all the obvious reasons, and I think the criteria that we as established media outlets bring that you can get good, honest, edited information in a reliable way has definitely played to our significant advantage. We've seen a significant increase in subscriptions. I might say we were the first outlet in Canada to put some of the stories outside the pay wall in the interest of the public, but obviously we've had much more success.

I would also say that this is really a story in which local is key. When we were able to actually come up with an infographic, which allowed you to go down to a specific neighbourhood in the greater Toronto area to find out what the risks were, how it was going, there was absolutely huge interest that did extremely well.

My time's almost up, so I would say overall, from the pandemic, subscriptions are up, advertising is down dramatically. We're going to discuss the whole issue of government aid. All I can say, and we have Ed Greenspon, he can echo these comments, this discussion about providing aid to some of the big media companies, it's been going on for five years. And I can report that, as of this very moment, we have not received one cent from any of those programs. Look forward to the discussion. Thank you.

Brent Jolly: Thanks very much John. That's a sobering thought. We'll definitely be picking up on that in the discussion. Colette please, the floor is yours.

Colette Brin: Thanks. Well, it's interesting that John mentioned the additional public advertising from governments, which was actually a source of support during the pandemic although these programs are perhaps more complex to execute and to administer so, that's also worth considering. And I'm maybe shooting myself in the foot because I'm actually part of that process. But I just wanted to say in completing what John just said about the impact on the media economy. What John described, I think focused on *The Toronto Star* and on newspapers specifically, and more largely, I would say based on a report that was put out last week on Quebec, but with some data for Canada as well.

The first wave really hit the whole media industry very hard. The publicly traded companies reported advertising losses of about three percent in the second quarter compared to 2019. And, based on the information we have, of course the daily newspapers were the hardest hit, and they were already the hardest hit by the funding crisis. You could say that it kind of accelerated a process that was already in place, and it, raises questions about the ability of our news ecosystems, which are already fragile to resist this kind of crisis. If there's a larger economic slowdown, it's going to impact media directly.

That's the impact on the business itself. But, actually, the question was about the debate on support for journalism as a business. So, support for journalism as a business, I assume we're talking not just about government aid, but also even consumer support, are people willing to pay for news? Before the pandemic hit we did this year's survey, for the digital news report with Reuters Institute, and we found that there was more Canadians who were paying for news subscriptions and for news online and in different forms.

So that's certainly encouraging. And what John just said suggests that in some cases, perhaps not for all publications, but there's been a willingness of Canadians to actually spend on news in the context of the pandemic. I think it's hard to say how much the pandemic impacts the public's perceptions of the news as a business. I think people have a lot of other issues on their minds right now, but certainly people have been more attentive to news, certainly aware of the importance of having up-to-date local quality news on the pandemic itself and on different aspects of confinement, as we're all kind of grounded in our community and geographically, we realize how important it is to know what's happening around us, I think, but that's not a scientific fact, it's more of an impression.

Just this morning, there was a story in the Canada's Ombudsman, which says that the number of complaints about Canada's news coverage has gone up 40 percent in the last year. So, you could see that as a glass 40 percent full or 40 percent empty, I guess. But in a sense, you could see it as people being more attentive to news and more critical of news, so in that sense you can see it as a good thing. And of course, there are some very vocal groups, that do not represent the population as a whole, who are very critical of government support for newsrooms. And that ties into some of the very vocal critiques of how the government is managing the pandemic. We certainly hear a lot about them here in Quebec, I'm not sure how representative they are of public opinion. I think they are a very small minority, but we do hear about them quite a bit.

And we know that from survey research on trust that attitudes towards media tend to follow attitudes towards governments and institutions in general. So if there's a surge in trust in governments as we've seen in the pandemic, of course there is a surge in trust in media that follows, and that might be something positive, but I'm not sure how much of that is permanent or will last beyond the first wave. And I just wanted to end with a last note on consumption and, having been confined at home for long periods of time, people are maybe spending more time following the news, but one of the mental health recommendations is actually follow less news. Perhaps that could be a little more negative for the news industry. I'll keep it at that for now.

Brent Jolly:

Thank you Colette. Everything in moderation, that's good. Emma please.

Emma: Gilchrist:

It's a pleasure to be here today, here at my house in Vicksburg and virtually with you all at Carleton. I'm the co-founder and executive director of *The Narwhal*. *The Narwhal* is an online magazine that does in-depth and investigative journalism about Canada's natural world. We're mostly focused in Western and Northern Canada right now, and we're really pioneering a new model for journalism, a new business model. We don't run any advertising and we don't have a pay wall, and yet our largest source of revenue is our readers. We're also a non-profit, one of Canada's very few news organizations that is structured as a non-profit.

The pandemic, in terms of its impact on us. Traffic throughout the pandemic has been up at most news outlets, and that was certainly the case for us as well in March, our traffic was up about 140 percent over March of the previous year. That was followed, the same for many publishers, by a COVID fatigue, if you will. This summer, when a lot of publishers saw their traffic drop off to more normal levels, we saw that as well. But since our largest source of funding is our readers, the pandemic hasn't had a negative effect on our business model, as it has had on the more traditional business models.

In fact, in the first six weeks of the pandemic, we ran our most successful membership drive ever, and our membership grew by about 45 percent in those first six weeks. We reached our year-end membership goal six months ahead of schedule. So, more traffic equals more readers, more engaged readers, more newsletter letter subscribers, more members for us. In terms of our business model, the pandemic has not necessarily been a bad thing. In terms of the larger support, for government measures to support journalism for instance, I think it's going to be interesting to see how that plays out.

We did become a qualifying Canadian journalism organization about a month ago, I believe we got the call from the CRA. That will qualify us for the Canadian Journalism Labour Tax Credit moving forward. And we've also applied for Registered Journalism Organization Status, which we hope to be one of the first in the country to attain because of our non-profit model. To me that's really the government just getting out of the way of journalism in this country and allowing us to issue tax receipts for something that deserves a tax receipt. I see that as a very positive move in the right direction. We are still waiting. It has been a lengthy process, but when we created *The Narwhal* two years ago, we never expected to get any kind of government support.

It's all gravy for us from the local journalism initiative today, QCJO Status to RJO status. Our budget has tripled in the two years since we started, we now have 10 full-time journalists and Canada's largest environment bureau. So, that model is working for us in the pandemic. If anything, it has just solidified the need for high quality journalism and trusting and engaging relationships with your readers. And that's been working out pretty well for us so far.

Brent Jolly: Thanks a lot Emma, and good job of getting all the alphabet soup acronyms there. Ed, the floor is yours.

Edward Greenspon: Two things off the top Brent. First of all, I was on the Board of Directors of Carleton, but more importantly, I am one of those BJ grads from Carleton, which really helped make a great life for me, a fun life for me. So, I am forever grateful to Carleton. And John Honderich is a bonafide journalist and am very grateful to him as well for his support over the years and his support for journalism particularly.

So let me start with the question of advertising money and the obvious statement that journalism doesn't just matter, our journalism always matters. You don't really know when journalism is going to matter. That's one of its great beauties, you're on patrol and when things don't make sense, journalism is there. I had someone who's very active and prominent in the climate movement say to me about a year and a half ago that, he thought the disinformation issue was more important than the climate issue. I was a bit taken aback by that. And he said, "Well, look, we can't have a good debate and a good discussion about climate, if people can't trust the information they get on the media. We need a base of facts that are shared in society in order for democracy to work and then in order to take action on climate."

I think that's an instructive thought as we go into this. Others have talked about the hit that's occurring in financial terms, I guess I would just add that in 2008, when the recession hit, the combined daily newspaper revenue from advertising was a little over two and a half billion dollars and immediately fell by about 15 percent to 20 percent between 2008-2009, it never recovered that money. It stayed at a lower level for few years and then went on a secular decline. And I would be quite worried that what we are seeing now, which was from a base of probably about \$800 million in 2019 for all of the dailies in Canada, down from about over \$2.5 billion, 12 years earlier, 10 years earlier. I expect we're going to be that \$600 million or under \$600 million this year, and that's not enough money to support journalism in this country. And I don't think that's coming back, given the secular elements that we have. Maybe a little bit of it, but if we have 20-25 percent, I suspect they're not coming back.

We documented this decline on "The Shattered Mirror," which was published in January of 2017. And I remember government officials, since we were going through it and walking them through our findings, they were astounded. Everybody knew the story in some ways, but to see chart after chart classified, advertising, even subscriptions, other pieces of the revenue pie, just going down and they've continued to go down. I'm happy that in 2019 the government decided that it would commit itself to a policy. I'm unhappy that it hasn't been able to deliver on that policy. I just want to talk about that for a moment. I want to talk about in a context of what our research and other research has shown about the public's attitude towards journalism. Very quickly, sometimes we think that people don't trust journalism. People do trust journalism. They trust mainstream journalism. They trust journalism that goes out with reporters, to find things out verified by editors. This is seen over and over again. Trust levels in the 60s and even the 70s present very high. They also want news when they feel they need news.

We have a lot of people in focus groups say things to us such as, "I get a lot of my news off Facebook," and then they would pause and say, "Except if it's important to me." "What do you do if it's important to you?" They'd say, "If it's important I don't trust my friends and my family to know any more than I know. I don't trust people who don't go out and find things out." We ask, "Well who do you rely on?" Then they start naming local news organizations. They start naming national TV anchors. They start naming columnists with whom they're familiar. They care about this. I conclude that they want a fire department of news. They don't want to have to encounter it or pay for it every day, but they do want it there when they need it, like now.

They're not willing to pay and Colette's work and research with Reuters shows pretty much, you can correct me Colette if this isn't up to date, but that about nine percent of Canadians say they're willing to pay for digital news.

Colette Brin: It's 13 percent now.

Ed Greenspon: We're at 13 percent? Excellent that's good.

Colette Brin: It was the biggest jump this year before the pandemic.

Ed Greenspon: Okay, and some of that goes outside the country. Some of that goes to the newyorktimes.com and other places as well. So not all of that is news by Canadians for Canadians. The research shows people are very nervous about the concept of government paying for news, supporting news organizations. To them, they have this block that one can understand, and it comes down basically to they still respect the function, the accountability function that journalism does, but they don't want that in any way compromised by government getting involved in it. If you asked them in a focus group, "Well what about the CBC," they look at their shoes, they don't want to have to square that circle. It's not incumbent upon them to figure out every angle, but they are uncomfortable about that.

In our work we said, "Okay the market is not going to support news adequately." This was in 2017. "So where does the money come from?" We felt there's three places money can come from. One would be from large pools of wealth, whether these were benevolent billionaires, or whether these are foundations and charities. Now the problem with benevolent billionaires is the words don't always go together.

You can see this is true the United States. John Henry and the *Boston Globe* may be a benevolent billionaire, but Sheldon Adelson in Las Vegas is not a benevolent billionaire. Simply put, Canada doesn't have a lot of billionaires, and it doesn't have a lot of benevolent ones. I suppose you can say the Thomsons are benevolent billionaires, but they're already invested in the news business, so they're not going.

Foundations, probably not enough money to be material for the problems at hand, but let's get on with the philanthropic promises that have existed there. Emma was telling us she's applied, time to get this thing going. This is a great victory to get journalism to count as a basis for charity. This kind of thing happens every 10 years. The last time it happened was amateur sport around the Vancouver Olympics was added in as a basis for charity. So let's get on with it. The other pieces of that \$595 million package, also same thing. The labour tax credit is a very good idea. I'd say it's an idea that after "The Shattered Mirror" we did a workshop. John was part of it. We had labour unions, we had publishers of all sorts, digital, print based, et cetera, and we've said the basic problem is we're losing our journalists, and that's what we have to correct for.

Labour tax credit's a pretty good policy because it's very neutral, it's very transparent, you can plan for it, it's predictable. There are some flaws in how the design was made, but I won't go into those now, and it's at the margin in a sense. Let's pay out 2019, let's pay out 2020. Most of the assertion whether you count as a journalistic organization or not is pretty easy. At the borders, there's going to be some difficult management, but I think we know *The Toronto Star* and *The Globe and Mail*, where I once worked and many other places, they're journalistic. Let's get on, and let's actually prepay 2020, because liquidity's a problem for these companies. Finally, the subscription tax credit, 15 percent is not enough to have any impact, so let's just make it 50 percent and get over with it. It will cost a little bit more money, but the government's been sitting on that money anyhow.

The final thing I'd say and I wanted to wait until Kevin got here so he could shoot me down on this set moment afterwards, the basic, the number one recommendations of "The Shattered Mirror" when you boil it down and I wish in retrospect I had expressed it better than I did, and Colette was part of our research team so she should have caught this, your fault Colette, the basic recommendation was that because people are suspicious, skeptical of government being involved, that it would be better to have a transfer from distributors to producers. We have a history of that in this country in the cable levy. Five percent of revenues from cable and satellite companies go into a production fund.

In this case, I would finance the labour tax credit in that manner, take it from digital sales, take a percentage of digital ad sales, do not target Google and Facebook. It should be a principle-based system that organizations that sell digital advertising and do not reinvest in Canadian journalism should be subject to a levy that will then be distributed in such a manner as the cable fund has been distributed for several decades. I'll end there without going to Australia and friends.

Brent Jolly:

Thanks Ed. I'm sure that'll come up though at some point. I'm glad to see that Kevin's joined us. The floor is yours for five minutes.

Kevin Chan:

Thanks. Actually thanks to Brent for getting me out of wherever other dimension I was in. I was actually listening to most of it though so I could hear most of the discussion. So thank you very much, merci beaucoup to everyone at Carleton. It's really great to be here and thank you to Allan Thompson for the invitation. The celebration that we're marking today is happening in the midst of a global pandemic as we've all discussed already, and that has been challenging I think for everyone. But I know in talking to many colleagues in the news business including folks like John Hines, Bob Cox and Philip Crowley, I know that it is particularly challenging for those in the news business, not all, and I take Emma's point.

But certainly when we think of the traditional news organizations, I think many of them have been challenged also at this time in a very particular way. Specifically, I've heard that COVID has been really an accelerant for the trend lines we've seen in the past say 20 years, as consumer behaviour in advertising has moved from print to digital. I think we have tried at Facebook to help in a few different ways. With respect to the COVID response specifically, we made an announcement earlier this year of \$100 million in investments across the globe for news publishers. We provide a million dollars in grants to local news outlets including 81 publications that receive these grants in Canada. We also provided an additional one million dollars to the International Fact-Checking Network run out of Poynter for fact checkers that were looking specifically at fact checking COVID misinformation.

That is of course over and above the \$9 million dollars we have invested in Canada specifically over the past three years. Some of the things that included are things such as our accelerator programs and other kinds of specialized programs for how to increase subscriptions, increase direct marketing efforts. I think *The Narwhal* has been part of one of those programs, my understanding is to very good effect, creation of partnerships with University of Ryerson to create the Digital News Innovation Challenge and two graduates of that program are actually in particular doing particularly well [out in Calgary].

Investments in other kind of digital news incubators like Indiegraf run by Erin Millar that of course houses the Discourse, but also things like La Converse. Most recently, and I'm really proud of this one, is our partnership with Canadian Press. Of course, we've invested a million dollars at CP to create eight new positions for the year to cover local news across the country, including for what I understand from Malcolm and Philip, the first position based out in Nunavut. That's the first for CP, and I'm personally very delighted to be part of that. It has been quite personally rewarding for me to help create some of these programs and partnerships. I think we want to do more, and we will do more, but I would say and maybe this gets to a bit of what Ed is alluding to, but I do have to say that for me, and I think for my colleagues, the recent debate in Canada about the relationship regarding publishers and platforms has been somewhat disappointing.

I've always seen Facebook, as I've tried to indicate here, as a constructive player in this, not only in terms of the investments that we've made, but also in the value that the platform itself provides to publishers. We can get into the specifics later, but I mean I do think that there are many different ways to continue to support news. I think Ed has alluded to some of them, but I think we need to be talking more together, and we need to be working more closely together and in constructive ways.

I have to admit I don't think I've seen that. That's not to any of you here because I am not in that role currently, but I think that's something that we have to do because this is bigger than any one company, and it's also going to be bigger than any one particular vector. So, we do need to work collaboratively, and I do look forward to discussing with colleagues what that can look like.

Brent Jolly:

Thanks very much Kevin, appreciate it. So now that we've heard everyone's opening statements, I want to shift briefly to a response round where the different panellists can have an opportunity to respond to comments that were made by any one of the colleagues on the panel. I'm going to go in the same order that we spoke the first time, so I'm going to go to John first.

John Honderich:

I'd like to echo the comments that Ed made about the advertising decline, what our experience has been, and quite frankly what we expect going forward. Ed is quite correct that after the 2008-2009 crash and all, advertising revenue declined dramatically. It's almost part of the old adage that once it goes away, they somehow forget about you. They find other ways to advertise. Often, you don't get those advertisers coming back. I think we're expecting probably the same phenomenon to occur this time, and I think Colette is quite correct that the news, the traditional news media particularly who is still with print products, have suffered some of the greatest declines that a lot of that advertising is gone and will not come back, certainly not in the print product.

So, all to say that the financial crisis, the financial strains that the industry broadly is facing has been exacerbated and the situation, when we say the business case was for them is done anyway, all that has made it worse. If any others are going to be able to survive, it's going to have to have aid coming in quite quickly because the numbers speak for themselves, and it's not a pretty picture.

Brent Jolly:

Great. Thank you. Colette please.

Colette Brin:

Yes, well there could be several points, but I'll try to keep it to one. I just had an additional thought about news ecosystems. It's not specifically about traditional versus digital or new start-up media, but there is a concern for me about the kind of support that we bring in, and how these measures of support are sustaining not just existing news companies, but also the renewal of the news ecosystem, so that was actually a concern during the "Shattered Mirror" consultations. Are we looking to sustain, and even some of the resistance to government aid is because of the question are we just supporting broken business models and just kind of keeping them on life support as opposed to supporting companies that are just getting started and have maybe a more promising future?

I don't want to get too much into the work of the CRA and the advisory board, which is confidential, but one of the issues that I'm struggling with is the kind of general interest news that we're supposed to be, that this program is designed to support, and more specialized areas such as *The Narwhal*. I mean we can talk about that case since it has been approved. That is, in a sense, a specialty publication because it's not doing city hall and the courts, and all the kinds of traditional news beats that we consider to be journalism. But it is covering the natural world. To me, that's a pretty big beat, and through all these different angles. There were a couple, and this is

something that came up a lot in the new media initiatives, of the new applicants that were specialized but in a different way than a traditional newspaper.

It's kind of a new thought as opposed to a response.

Brent Jolly: Yes, but it rethinks what a beat looks like. I think that we're seeing a lot more specialization, and that's what's turning at least some profitability, so I think that's good. Emma, would you like to speak to that, or anything else?

Emma Gilchrist: Sure, I'll speak to that. Just in terms of when a beat is so large, I often say *The Narwhal* is the environment section of the newspaper, except there isn't one of those. So it's pretty mainstream. It's pretty general interest. I kind of try to avoid the word niche, that we're specialized, we're experts on that topic, but we're by no means niche. We look to be a site that any Canadian could come to and read for their environmental news. One thing that occurred to me, I agree with so much of what everybody has said, and it's a very troubling situation for different models of media, but I do think we have to be careful about kind of prejudging the potential for philanthropic support for journalism in Canada by looking at the fact that there hasn't been much. There hasn't been much because it hasn't really been allowed.

There hasn't been an avenue for that. No, we aren't going to likely have the Knight Foundation or some of the large journalistic foundations in the United States that provide massive amounts of support, but I don't think that means that it's not material. When you look at the way that a digital news model can be built these days, what organizations really need is runway funding to get the plane off the ground, to build the model, and to create the kind of perpetual motion machine where if you have an audience, and you're doing good work, you're going to be able to convert a certain number of those into paying members or subscribers. It's not like we need a philanthropic sector that can prop up all of Canadian journalism, but what we do need is a philanthropic sector that will help fund innovation in journalism.

I personally feel quite hopeful that will happen, that there are many Canadian foundations that have within their purview issues of democracy for instance that are very related to journalism. So yes, while I don't think it's going to be the panacea for Canadian journalism, I think it's too soon to say that it's not going to make a material impact.

Brent Jolly: It's a good point. It's a really good point. Ed, I think you had some thoughts on that or something else?

Edward Greenspon: Yes, I'll just respond to two comments that were made to agree with them. One, Colette's point that the media model is different and policy needs to reflect that difference post the "Shattered Mirror." One of them was called something along the lines of What Journalism Can Learn From The Saskatchewan Roughriders. What Journalism Could Learn from The Saskatchewan Roughriders was a business that was going bankrupt around the turn of the century and was turned into a community-based not for profit, and was able to get an entire new lease on life. I'm all for profit organizations and many of the start-ups are for profit. The Logic is for profit. I'm also all for not-for-profit organizations. I think the thing is we're going to have a whole bunch of different kinds of models that are emerging.

Mostly to Colette's point, a lot of them are going to be smaller than what I'm accustomed to. I also really like large newsrooms. I like them because they have the capacity to waste talent for a year or two without knowing if they're getting a payoff. Having said that, that's not the world that we're moving to. We're moving to a world of more newsrooms and smaller newsrooms. I think policy hasn't caught up with that adequately yet. The problem with the government's package is it's really not fully thought out. If you look at it and go through it, it doesn't meet the principles of being business model neutral and platform neutral adequately. It has more work still to be done there.

My second point would be on Kevin's comment on that the solution is bigger than any one company, I couldn't agree more. What we don't want is a future in which journalism is dependent on the goodwill of other private sector actors for its wherewithal. If this is a public good, and it *is* a public good, then public policy needs to solve this problem at the core of the problem. Google has announced a huge fund in a bunch of countries, and it selected a couple of news organizations to support in Canada. I don't think the future of news should be decided by who Google thinks is worthy of the future of news. I think we need a much more neutral approach that is supported by public policy.

Brent Jolly:

Thanks Ed. That's great. Kevin, last voice on this round.

Kevin Chan:

Sure. I'm just going to echo the same thing. I think digital news innovation is key. Some of you will know, Ed will know that as of I think 2017, we've been on this journey, so certainly we've been in partnership with Janice and the gang at Ryerson as well the digital media zone. That is really I think one key pillar of this right, just to figure out what the future of news can look like on the internet. There are incredible entrepreneurs and practitioners, like Emma, who are pioneering that and I think that's a big piece of the puzzle. On the point that Emma made about philanthropy in this country, it's interesting. I don't want to say too much but, I mean Brent, you and I were talking about this, and I think both of us found this surprising. I was on a call recently with folks from the McConnell Foundation. They bring together interested parties who want to support news. I had not talked to them about our work with Canadian press, but we started the call and they declared us, Facebook in Canada, to be the top independent, private funder, or supporter of news in Canada.

And I said, "Well, that doesn't sound right." But then we talked about it and I was like, "Oh, maybe that is right." And I agree, I think we should do more. I have some ideas about that, but I'd like to noodle around maybe with colleagues afterwards. But I do think there is something in the space of how can we catalyze Canadians and get more Canadians to pay for news and value news. I think there's something there, some of us can catalyze that, but I think at the end of the day you want people to find it perfectly normal to pay for news. Like I did, like I still do, I still have my happy address on my print mail, every day, delivered to my door. We need more people doing that, whether it be print or digital.

So, how do we do that? I have some ideas, but I do think we need to figure out how to work together to just crack that nut because I think it's a really hard one. The last one just on advertising transfers, obviously I'm going to have to say this because, from where I sit, I just think advertising is a model that has worked well in the past in

print. It currently works well online, but I'm not sure for example, Emma, doesn't rely on that.

And there are other publications that are largely focused on subscription revenue as the future. So, I'm not sure that building a system that assumes advertising should always be an important underpinning of the internet or of news or any other business is something that's going to necessarily transcend or sort of stand the test of time. So, I agree with Ed, the answer is public policy, but we have to think things through that are technology neutral, that are undergirded by principals, that are going to stand the test of time and that are going to be applicable, irrespective for what perspective you come at it from.

Those are very important foundational things for any kind of framework. I would think we would want to think through what those things are because I don't think we're there yet.

Brent Jolly: That's interesting. I think a lot about that the idea, which I've heard from all of you now, that says media policy hasn't kept up with reality and that's something that everybody can agree on. I'd like to segment it though into two sections. I'd like to talk about what the government is proposing to do and then what kind of relationship can be sketched out with technologies like Facebook and Google? So, the first thing I'm thinking about is the \$595 million package that the federal government has put forward. I'd be interested to know what you think. Is that now currently fit to purpose actually based on the realities in a post pandemic or during this pandemic, is that actually enough or hitting the right notes in order to support a strong news ecosystem in Canada?

Colette Brin: I would go back to ask a question about that. Because I'm actually part of that process. I can't speak for the CRA or of course for the minister, but in terms of the aid not being platform neutral, I'm not sure what you meant by that because we've already supported and given the green light to quite a few digital new sources. So, I'm not sure what you were looking at in the policy that was problematic.

Ed Greenspon: Some of what I was looking at has been corrected recently, has been addressed recently, including the written media aspect of things. So podcasts are good.

Colette Brin: That's for the prescription part. That's for subscription not for the labour credit. Yes.

Edward Greenspon: And then even something as simple in business model neutrality, the two employees working a minimum, I think it's two weeks a year of 26 hours, I think it was. And I can understand why the government would want to have some minimum threshold. I can understand that very well, that I shouldn't just go down to the basement and start up my news organization with government support. But if they just said, for instance, okay, we want \$2000 in the 80 hours, which was, I think what that would equal.

And you can decide if you want to have 10 people doing 208 hours, or you want to have two people doing it because different people have different models with freelancers and others. That would be getting out of the way, as I said, many of these points, Colette, are at the margins. So, I don't want to make too much about them.

Colette Brin: Okay. Yes. And we don't want to get too much into policy detail because we'll lose all our participants.

- Brent Jolly:** Does anybody else have any thoughts about whether the program now, are there things that are missing that have come to light because of the pandemic? First John and then Emma.
- John Honderich:** I'll go back to your more fundamental question, is it enough? I don't think, from the beginning, the response of the major media companies was, this was going to help but it wasn't going to in fact, allow for survival. On the issue of philanthropy and the foundations, you know, it's interesting that you brought up the McConnell Foundation whose monies came from the great *Montreal Star* and they've done pathetically little, I would say in the whole area of journalism, pathetically little! There is no tradition of philanthropy in this country and that's largely been because people can't get a slip for it. So, we're starting from scratch. It is interesting. You can look to the United States because they changed their rules back in the late nineties for philanthropy. It's taken quite a while, but at least they've now had some foundations and people like Bill Gates who viewed this as being important. I haven't seen any of that in Canada or very little.
- Brent Jolly:** You make a good point. Emma?
- Emma Gilchrist:** To follow on that, I was going to speak to the government policies, but now I'll follow on that a little bit too. It has been pathetically little because, as you say, there hasn't been the tax receipt so, it's like we've been just shutting that off. At the same time, 70 percent of our support comes from philanthropic foundations and our reader's support is the largest single chunk of our pie as a full 30 percent. But we're getting money from over 10 different foundations, but I know that we're a small example. You can't look at *The Narwhal* and be like, "Yes, I know, just do more of that, that's going to solve Canadians' journalism problems." Obviously, it's not, but maybe many models like *The Narwhal* would be a significant part of the solution.
- A newsroom of 10 or 20 people is not insignificant when you get working a beat. But back to the government policy end of things. I actually think that the government did a pretty good job designing those policies and looking at who should be in and who should be out and having some kind of minimum requirements. I could see they were looking to the United States and some of the requirements around funding transparency, for instance, disclosing your donors, editorial independence, not receiving more than 20 percent of funding from a single source. I think those are all really smart moves in terms of the registered journalism organization status. My key beef is probably around the local journalism initiative, which I think did a very rapid job of getting reporters out into communities across the country.
- However, the story quota issue, they're looking for upwards of seven stories a week now, I think, from a single reporter. While I know that is achievable in a straight news environment, for someone like *The Narwhal*, we're about helping our readers make sense of the world, providing context. We think readers want a better, not more and, just like blasting people with stories that somebody can turn around in three hours from a press release, doesn't jive with our model. That's not how we're going to keep our readers around and paying for journalism. I do hope that on the local journalism initiative, there'll be a little bit more wiggle room around that story quota moving forward.

- Brent Jolly:** That's interesting. Emma, can I just back up to one thing that you said because I know you've been involved with the Institute for Non-profit News in the United States, and so you're in that sphere of thinking. What is it that foundations, because you mentioned there's quite a few that are interested, what is the so-called value proposition for lack of a better description that they find interesting about *The Narwhal* and is there a way to forecast that onto what might be coming after the pandemic?
- Emma Gilchrist:** Yes, I think that a lot of foundations are interested in all sorts of public good, whether that's empowering people to engage in their democracy, whether it's issues of environmental democracy and just straight information needs of communities. *The Narwhal* has been able to make a compelling case that there are gaps in the information needs in the coverage of these topics and these foundations are really interested in filling in those gaps and reaching an audience of people who really care about these issues. I think that could be replicated on all number of issues, whether total general interest news or other specific topics. There're foundations of every shade in Canada interested in various different things. I do think that there's potential, but is it going to save *The Global Mail* if the business model isn't working otherwise? Probably not, but can it assist in an evolving business model? I think that it can.
- Brent Jolly:** Thank you. Ed, I want to go to you and then I'll ask Kevin about some of the tech platform. So, go ahead.
- Edward Greenspon:** First off, I feel honour bound to come to the defence of the McConnell Foundation, particularly since yesterday, I was on a different panel and was praising the McConnell Foundation so, I want to be consistent. I'm not sure why John picks on McConnell, particularly. It might be a Toronto-Montreal thing, I don't know. Atkinson certainly has done a good job. When we were looking to finance the Shattered Mirror, we decided that we would go to three foundations that had made their money off of newspapers and that was McConnell, Atkinson and Max Bell and they all supported the research that we did. I find foundations, generally in Canada, haven't done a lot. Then again, the rules still are not completely in place to enable that and, then again, we don't have really, truly wealthy foundations. We don't have a Bill Gates. We don't have fortunes of \$50 million sitting in foundations and McConnell seems to have done some decent work relative to the condition, particularly in trying to capacity build, trying to bring other foundations to understand journalism.
- And I'd just say one other thing because somebody mentioned that the labour tax credit is a pretty good model and I agree, I think it is a very good model. So, I've been looking at some of the stuff that Australia is proposing, and I've put a lot of attention, obviously, to the forced negotiation around copyrighted material, which by the way is not something I suspect is going to work out very well as a policy. But Australia is also really following the Canadian model on something they'd call PIJ, public interest journalism. They're putting forward tax concessions or incentives, quote "Designed to lower the cost of employing journalists. So, encourage effort devoted to activities that will generate public benefits." This is right out of our Labour Tax Credit and I think Canada should be happy that it's a model and obviously countries should be drawing off the best of each other, but we have something to offer in this regard.

- Brent Jolly:** Interesting. Kevin, I wanted to ask you, you mentioned about having more constructive dialogues with publishers between tech platforms. Could you explain a little bit more about maybe what that looks like in practice?
- Kevin Chan:** I don't have a sort of a process in mind. I think in almost every other space in the work that I do, everything from election integrity to civic engagement, to empowerment and supporting networks of activists to misinformation, all those fronts, we have very rich and substantive discussions with the entire ecosystem. Like NGOs, thought leaders, civil society, academics. We just haven't had that with publishers. I have to tell you the first time that I was aware that there was distress was when I saw, because I still subscribed to *The Globe and Mail* in print, was when I saw on the weekend, back in May, that one-page ad. I was like, this is interesting and I think my first question was, why didn't anybody call us?
- I don't think it's actually that complicated. It's this idea that Allan would reach out to me following his appointment saying, "You should come and talk about the stuff you're doing, I really appreciate that." It's the idea that John Fraser would reach out and say, "Hey, I like what you're doing. We should talk." Colette, I invited you for a morning tea in Quebec City when I was visiting a few years ago. I mean, that's kind of what we need to do and it strikes me that, it's incredible that there's been no discussion. And I'm just telling you that straight up. So, it seems like the posture has been adopted very clearly about where certain organizations feel things should go. But there actually hasn't been any discussion underpinning any of that, which I think anybody would find that surprising and curious.
- Brent Jolly:** I wanted to ask you too about today. BD Canada released a call for the federal government to basically model a policy on the Australian model. And I just wanted to get your thoughts because it's sort of a breaking news kind of thing. I wanted to get your thoughts on what you think that will do, especially how it will impact this kind of dialogue.
- Kevin Chan:** Look, I have to be honest. I haven't read the report because it's small business week as well this week and so I was with some small businesses working with them on how they grow their businesses during COVID. But I did read the news release because someone sent it to me and I have to admit I haven't read the details, but in reading the news release, if the news release accurately describes what's in the report, I didn't recognize Facebook in that news release. They made some claims, which I don't think map in any way back to our products and how and what the relationship between publishers and platforms are, at least with respect to Facebook. I can't speak for others, but I have to tell you when I read that I actually pinged my colleague and asked them, "What do you think this refers to?" So I'm a bit puzzled and I can be very specific if you like.
- Brent Jolly:** I was just wondering what section you're thinking.
- Kevin Jolly:** There's a whole section about the advertising, where they made reference to how we take most of the revenue, even on ads that are served on their sites. I have to tell you, we have an advertising system called Audience Network, but Audience Network doesn't work for desktop, it only works for apps. And not only that but organizations, the website adds our apps or publishing apps, if publishers have apps. For those

who do, they take the majority of the revenue so it's actually completely the opposite of what's being claimed in the news release. I don't really know why it might be an issue or they got us confused with some other platform? That's possible. But I can tell you that it doesn't describe Facebook and it doesn't describe how Audience Network works with Facebook. So, I was very puzzled by it.

Brent Jolly: Okay. John, as a former publisher, have you had a chance to read the report yet?

John Honderich: No, I haven't read that report but I think the studies and I know the Australian example and they specifically looked at Facebook and Google. They figured out exactly how much ad revenue was taken out of the country, and they compared that to the amount of taxes that was paid in Australia and the gap was huge. That's the study that was done quite a while ago and is the basis for a lot of their report. I think a study like that should be done here as well to find out the gap. I mean, I think the facts are pretty clear. I'd like to say something to add as well about the McConnell Foundation and the McConnell Foundation is the largest in the country.

Kevin Chan: Can I respond to what he said while we wait for John?

Brent Jolly: Sure, Kevin. Go ahead, please.

Kevin Chan: I mean, I have to tell you and it's kind of actually to my regret that John and I have never really spoken because I suspect we'd get along if we had a chance to have a private conversation. You know, I sincerely believe that. Michael Geist has written a very interesting blog on this and you can look it up @michaelgeist.ca. He looked at *The Toronto Star*, specifically. If you look at the way, and again I'm not here to explain how the entire internet works, I can only speak to the Facebook portion.

But I have to tell you the way publisher content gets onto Facebook is with publishers putting things on Facebook. We actually don't control that, the system doesn't take stuff and put it into newsfeed, publishers put things onto newsfeed. Those are just the facts of how the mechanics of Facebook works. So a framework that is not based on those facts, obviously it would be very hard for us to be able to bridge. Now, I agree with John though, I think the broader point, there's two issues here. What's the relationship between publishers and platforms? That's one thing and then there's another thing, which is tax. I think it's totally appropriate for there to be taxes that are going to address the concerns that have been flagged.

I mean, should the government collect the remit sales tax and force us to collect and remit the sales tax, create rules for that? I think that's very normal. It's very normal to want to do that and we would never oppose that. Should a particular government based in a particular country, like Canada, want to have a greater share of revenue from multinational digital companies? I think I can totally understand that logic. It's not a Facebook or a Shopify or a Google that's resisting that. There are broad international rules since the 1920s that undergird the way that the international tax system works. There's a process through the OECD that's trying to reform that. We do not at all oppose that. I think, in fact, we support that process, and we fully appreciate that at the end of that process, we are likely to pay more taxes than Canada and probably, net at the end, more taxes globally. It's a perfectly legitimate and an appropriate outcome, but we do need to have rules that are consistent for everybody. And I think that's been the point. I actually would say, from a public

policy standpoint, we want to break apart. It's not like tax policy is one thing. The kind of rules or the way in which publishers and platforms work together and what the relationship is and what the mechanics are in terms of how things get onto systems and how they get distributed and where the value lies, that's a very different proposition.

Edward Greenspon: I just want to encourage Kevin to run for Parliament on a platform of taxing digital giants.

Kevin Chan: I think we already have every party running on that.

Brent Jolly: I want to go to John and get your final thoughts on this. I know you had something you were saying, and also to resolve the McConnell Foundation in this Toronto-Montreal rivalry, which will probably never end, but I also then want to go to a question on the discussion board.

John Honderich: I just wanted to add, the McConnell Foundation is the largest foundation in Canada. You can look at the amount. It has those wonderful picnics on an island in the St. Lawrence River, where people scratch their foreheads and wonder about the future, but they've done not much at all, as have most foundations, and if giving you \$5,000 to do some research for the "Shattered Mirror" counts as a big contribution, I think your standards are lower than they should be. That's my only point.

Brent Jolly: That's a good point. I want to go to the question board here. We have a question about the role of universities and other research organizations in terms of forming partnerships to provide more accurate and in-depth coverage of issues. I know for example, that there's the Institute for Investigative Journalism at Concordia. I just read today that Rob Cribb is starting something similar affiliated with the Monk School at the UFT. I wanted to go to Colette as the sort of the resident academic person here to sort of get her thoughts on how you see this role of universities playing in here.

Colette Brin: There are journalism schools that are already collaborating and doing this kind of investigative or data work with newsrooms. The problem with universities is that they tend to have their own interests and to be very focused on whatever serves the institution or promotes the research that's being done at the institution. So, something that's been very successful is The Conversation, which was a university-based initiative in Canada, by colleagues at UBC, but when you're talking about partnering with specific newsrooms, I had a research centre. We do work with different media organizations, but we always struggle with the issue which is which one do we get married to? We'd rather work with the media ecosystem more generally and associations and that kind of thing, rather than partner with one specific organization.

So that's also a challenge, for sure, and what we're seeing a lot of in the research world is actually research centres getting funding to create news websites on climate, on whatever issues and they actually hire, what they call, journalists, and they do their own kind of reporting. We're seeing kind of this fragmentation of the media ecosystem and these are positive contributions, but I agree with what Ed said earlier, that it's important to have these big newsrooms that cover a wide range of issues and topics and beats.

Edward Greenspon: At *The Star* we've also had, for about the last three or four years, a program dare I say, with Ryerson, but obviously in the same city as we are, and investigative reporters. They've actually done some very significant work. Work that in fact has won awards, and it has been working with the journalism students at Ryerson. We've also had some input from across the country, and so far, it's worked extremely well. It's not large, but it's been significant.

Brent Jolly: If no one has any further thoughts on that, I'd be interested to know what people think about the idea of the role of the university or post-secondary institution as helping to facilitate some of the public engagement or to explain why news matters. Some of the democratic pieces around that. I think, Emma, as you said and Colette as well. "We're focusing."

Colette Brin: That's basically my whole job.

Brent Jolly: Good. I'm glad somebody's doing it, but how do we go about priming the audience to help them understand? In the last session that I sat in on, Chris Waddell had a pie chart that shows as you said earlier, I think you said 13 percent, which is higher. I think it was nine percent a couple of years ago if I'm not mistaken, but how do you go about priming the audience for them to understand the importance of news and why bother paying for it when they've had it for free since the dawn of time.

Kevin Chan: Since the late 1990s.

Brent Jolly: Right.

Kevin Chan: Brent on that line, I think that's sort of one of the points that I did bring up earlier, and I think it's important for us to kind of pursue after this if we do to all get together. Certainly on my end, we've talked to Ryerson. I very much enjoy the time that I've had through the conversations with Chris and Susan and Chris Waddell and Chris Dornan and Susan to Carleton. You've been great. I mean, we've tried to talk to some other journalism schools, I think with less success, but we should do more. Maybe through an appropriate, neutral party to convene these sorts of things, and why stop at journalism schools? We should do it at the public policy schools too.

Everybody should come together and try to figure out what's the right way to think about this? We're all Canadian. We care about this as an important element of our democracy. I don't think we are naive. And what I heard from everybody was, "Look, things are going to change. Things are going to look different." What does that different look like? Emma was actually charting the course herself as to what the future could look like. We need to come to the table with that kind of framework and that kind of mindset and figure out what we can do together. The Connell Foundation, clearly, despite what has been said, they are trying to do a bit of that. I don't know if they're talking to universities too, but I think we should all get together and figure out what we can do collectively, because it is a collective concern. We care about this because we're Canadian.

Brent Jolly: Ed or Colette, do you have thoughts on the role public policy schools, universities could play in shaping the conversation?

Edward Greenspon: I'm sorry. I've been totally distracted. We're at this wonderful event that Carleton's put on and I keep hearing these mentions about Ryerson and I just figured the chair of the Ryerson Journalism School must be an absolute genius. That's all I can think.

Colette Brin: There's no conflict of interest there at all.

Edward Greenspon: No, not at all. I think it's important everybody knows that she is a Carleton journalism graduate. On the question, yes, everybody should be talking about the state of our democracy. And this is obviously a foundational issue. Journalism is a major part of it. I always like to say that a broke press, and by that I mean financially broke press, can't be a sufficient free press, and it can't do the job that it needs to do for society. Everybody should be discussing that, and they should be discussing information and heat online and the way that pollutes our civic discourse. These are profoundly important issues.

I say from a public policy forum point of view, we have a citizen assembly currently ongoing on these issues, particularly the issues of disinformation and heat and what to do about these, and we have a Canadian commission on democratic expression that includes among its commissioners, Beverly McLaughlin and Adam Dodek, the Dean of Law at University of Ottawa, and five others. A good group, and they're struggling and sweating to figure out how you deal with free speech and harms that are getting caused through the system, particularly hate as their prime emphasis, but other harms, including disinformation as well.

Kevin Chan: So are we.

Edward Greenspon: There are a lot of people doing this work. Kevin came and testified before them.

Colette Brin: There's actually a lot of academic research being done on disinformation and online hate. I don't see enough connection with journalism being done there. It's like they're separate spheres. And I can say that the McConnell Foundation, it's just kind of a running inside joke in this panel, is involved in those efforts as well. But the relationship between that and journalism and making people understand that if journalism disappears, that's kind of a big problem in terms of disinformation and misinformation and that needs to be paid for. It's what we've been saying for years, that it's not free. Journalism is not free. It needs to be sustained.

Brent Jolly: What kind of attitudinal shifts need to take place then? I mean, we've only got five minutes, but I wanted to get Emma in on this one because I think she's probably the best position to answer this one. Journalists are remarkable at telling the stories of other people, but we are awful at telling our own stories. I was just looking at the the Ryerson JSource and the CHA Impact map, and I noticed that the latest numbers, we have 810 permanent layoffs since the beginning of the pandemic. So, this is what's going on. It's hard to communicate that. So how do you rewrite the story so that people understand better, Emma?

Emma Gilchrist: I think with anything, the best way to communicate with people is to meet them where they're at and take them where you want them to be, and in that sense, trying to tell people that they need to care about journalism is generally not the best approach. The way to get people to care about journalism is to do good journalism

on issues they care about that hit close to home for them, and then to have a system in place where you're like, "Ah, ha, you're here reading about this Cory in your neighbourhood that's polluting your local stream. Great. Would you like to subscribe to our newsletter? Awesome. Okay, now you're on our newsletter. We're going to give you a great welcome series. We're going to tell you all about us. Oh, what do you know? You're going to get a weekly newsletter. Now we're going to report back to you on the impact of this story, then we're going to come to you and we're going to say, we have this big idea to do this \$15,000 investigation into this mine over here. Do you want to support us to do it yet?"

And people do. You have got to meet them somewhere. You have to have a funnel. I'm talking to Facebook accelerator language here. I spent some time in the non-profit world, this is outside of our own sector because the people we have on the bus who built the news industry on advertising, those aren't necessarily the same skills we need to build a new model for media, which is really around working, a business funnel, meeting people where they're at, and ultimately, all of our organizations do really good journalism and it's about being able to capture those readers and make a business case to them and make compelling appeals to them about the impact of your work.

Brent Jolly:

Kevin, I see you have your hand up, and you're nodding.

Kevin Chan:

I can add something. I had my hand up for something else, but I love the funnel language, I was lucky enough to spend some time on some of the accelerator programs we have run, and this is very fascinating stuff. I think Emma's right. I think there's a lot of things that we can port in when we think about the future of digital news. We had Bob Cox and the *Winnipeg Free Press* as part of one of our accelerators. I was down in California with them for one of the sessions. He said, "This is basically a mini MBA for publishers, for journalists." And I was like, "Oh, I hadn't thought of that way, but yes. I guess this is about business tools to help your business grow."

And we should do more of that. I'd love to work on something like that, as one piece of a much broader menu of things that we have to do to get this going in the direction we want it to go, but again I come back to the point that I had made earlier. I don't think the adversarial nature of what I've read and what I've seen and what I've heard is terribly productive. We have to deal with a challenge that we all care about right now. We've got to work together on that. I think that's very important. I know you guys all feel the same, but if there are others who you talk to, who feel like that's an important thing to do, then you know how to find me, let's get something going now. Because we can't wait. It's important. We've got to get it right.

Brent Jolly:

Great. Last question. I like to end on a positive note wherever possible, just so that everybody has something positive to take away from the session, and especially, Lord knows in days like today, anything positive is something good to hold onto. We heard earlier today from Julie Petty and the International Federation for Journalists, and the Tow Center, who have a report that they recently released, and one of the main things that they said is that the pandemic offers a really great opportunity to reimagine what journalism looks like in the future. If we could do 15 seconds for

each person going down the panel, what is one thing that you're encouraged by for the future of journalism? We'll start with Colette.

- Colette Brin:** Health and science journalism. In my experience, in the pandemic, it has really been amazing, especially here in Quebec. And there's actually a great appetite for that kind of news. And I'm hoping that it will grow in the years to come.
- Brent Jolly:** Thank you. Emma?
- Emma Gilchrist:** I'm really inspired by membership models, *The Guardian* internationally being a huge leader in that, and the *Sprawl* in Calgary is doing awesome work.
- Brent Jolly:** Right on. Thank you. Ed?
- Edward Greenspon:** I'm encouraged that people turn to journalists when things matter to them, and I don't think it's for them to solve how journalism will work. It's for us to fix how it will work for them. How we will make it work and it won't happen without a public policy element to it.
- Brent Jolly:** Great. Kevin, please.
- Kevin Chan:** I think I'm optimistic about some of the successes we're seeing. Emma talked about her success at *The Narwhal*. We talked about the *Sprawl*. I think that's really encouraging, but it's not just the digital start-ups. It's big players. I think that's hope for all of us. John maybe disagrees, or knows something that I don't, but I think those are good things and we should try to find ways to support more publications.
- Brent Jolly:** Great. John, you started us off. Let's bring us home.
- John Honderich:** What the pandemic has been showing, once again, and this is a variation on what Ed has said, when there's a story that's really important, and as Emma brings it right home to what people care about, the first place people want to turn to is traditional media, and the response, and certainly from our company, the response that we've had is evidence of that. When it comes to news that is important, that people depend on, rely on, they still turn to traditional sources and that's got to be the basis on which we should be able to build something.
- Brent Jolly:** Thank you to all of our five panellists. Wonderful discussion, wonderful debate. Thank you taking time out of your afternoon. On behalf of Carleton, thanks for doing this. As a Carleton graduate myself, I'm happy to declare no conflicts of interest in this whatsoever and look forward to seeing you in other sessions over the next day and a half.



JOURNALISM IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

JOURNALISM ETHICS

PANEL

Moderator: Aneurin Bosley, Carleton University

Speakers: Pat Perkel, National NewsMedia Council of Canada; Anita Varma, Santa Clara University;
Stephen J.A. Ward, Center for Journalism Ethics

Aneurin Bosley:

Welcome everybody. I'm Aneurin Bosley, assistant professor in the School of Journalism and Communication at Carleton University. Before we begin, I do want to acknowledge that Carleton's campus is located on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin nation. I'm very pleased to be moderating this panel on journalism ethics. The COVID19 pandemic has served as a poignant reminder that people in the world are increasingly connected. The coronavirus has spread to virtually all corners of the world, becoming a primary concern for billions of people from countless different cultures.

At the same time, the pandemic has raised many questions related to ethics, such as how we think about a more global conception of ethics, how we cover more marginalized communities that also happen to be disproportionately affected by the pandemic, or how we think about such things as health data at a time when our collective health is more inter-related than it's been in generations. It goes without saying that ethics is a large and complex area, but I think this panel will give us all some new and important ways to think about it. Let me introduce the panellists.

Anita Varma is the assistant director for journalism and media ethics, as well as social sector ethics, at Santa Clara University in California, and a lecturer at the University of California Berkeley. Varma was also an online advertising strategist at Google, which is a very interesting addition. Stephen J.A. Ward is professor emeritus and distinguished lecturer on ethics at the University of British Columbia. He's written and edited 10 books on media ethics including the award-winning *Radical Media Ethics and the Innovation of Journalism Ethics*. Pat Perkel is the executive director of the National News Media Council, former editor of *Your Commonwealth*, and a member of the Ethics Advisory Committee at the Canadian Association of Journalists.

Welcome to all of you and thank you very much for joining us.

I want to make two quick points about process. First on the socio-platform, for all the people who are joining us, you have a chat feature, so please feel free to ask questions as they arise, and once we get into the discussion segment, I'll moderate those questions and present them in as orderly a way as I can. Second, Anita is unfortunately not able to stay with us until the end of this session, so after her presentation, we'll pause for a few minutes, so that she can answer any questions you might have. After that, we'll continue with presentations from Stephen and Pat, and then take more general questions at that point.

I will now hand the floor over to Anita Varma.

Anita Varma:

Thank you so much, and many thanks to all the organizers. I know there's been a tremendous amount of work put into bringing us together for Journalism in the Time of Crisis. As Aneurin mentioned, I am at the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, which is at Santa Clara University in the Bay area of California, which you may have seen in the news for a variety of reasons, not the least of which have been wildfires as well as rising COVID cases. Honestly, since the beginning of the pandemic, it's been difficult to find a reprieve. My focus in journalism ethics is on how we can help journalists do what they're trying to do, better. And I've never met a journalist who says, "What I'd really like to do is exhaust audiences, to de-sensitize them to really pressing issues."

If you know of a reporter who says that is their goal, please let me know. But what I hear from the journalists who I work with is that they're trying to help. They're trying to do work that will help improve the biggest issues that affect all of us, and at this moment, COVID rises to the top of that list in many regions. The major ethical consideration that I see coming up all the time, and yet not really being addressed head on in the pandemic is this issue of desensitization. And the remedy that I want to suggest, and that I offer to journalists who I work with at the Markkula Center is something called "solidarity reporting," where we focus on communities and what those communities' needs are, in their own words. Let me take a couple of steps back before we get there.

To start by explaining what I mean by desensitization. Back in April, at what feels like a very long time ago, I wrote a piece for the Markkula Center's blog, which was called "What to do when the numbers in the news become numbing." And as most of you, if not all of you, have probably experienced, reading a lot of numbers and heavy accounts can start to desensitize us to what's going on, even when what's happening has a very real and immediate threat to each of us. It's not necessarily very far away that there's something bad happening, and yet the impact of numbers is somewhat unsurprising given that this is consistent across different types of coverage we have seen in the past.

In the United States, we're seeing numbers about COVID cases, numbers about COVID deaths. We also see lots of numbers about unemployment, numbers about who is going to win the presidential election, how many votes have been cast, and it's a barrage of numbers that from many journalists' perspectives are meant to offer an ethical representation of a large and uncomplicated population, and yet the impact on audiences can be to overwhelm them and, ultimately, lead them to turn away from issues that really do matter to them. Looking into the social psychology literature on fatigue, all of this starts to become a little less mysterious.

When people feel overwhelmed, when they feel over aroused, when they feel that there's tons of bad stuff happening and I need to pay attention to all of it, there's consistently three things that will happen. Number one, people will grow distressed. If you know someone who is not at all distressed right now, I would like to meet them. Number two, people start to try to emotionally regulate, and that often means blaming the victim, to say that the people who are contracting COVID, people who are still suffering, they probably did something to bring it upon themselves. They probably took an unnecessary risk, maybe they didn't really take what their comorbidities were seriously. It could happen to them but certainly it's not a widespread issue. That is the type of mental gymnastics people start to engage in, to try to emotionally regulate down from this heightened fear state, but no one can sustain that.

The third piece of this process is that people will go numb, and they'll turn away. And that is unfortunately exactly what we're seeing right now in many parts of the United States, where people are expressing pandemic fatigue. They're tired of it, they're tired of reading about the pandemic, they're tired of learning about the pandemic, they're tired of the precautions, they're simply tired of it. As a result, news coverage that is focused on the numbers, on the scale of threat, and on the continued lack of resolution among our leaders, about how to address it, audiences

will turn away from that as well, which is really concerning as we enter the cold and flu season, which is expected to bring back even more of this virus load and cases of it.

I'll say two things on that before moving into our remedy, which is that this is unsurprising. We see this in coverage of wars, coverage of homelessness, coverage of natural disasters, where the appeal to numbers and statistics which I believe for many journalists is coming from a good place, of trying to convey magnitude, and yet numbers alone lead to a numbing process that is something we can entirely anticipate and we're already seeing happen yet again. That's where the ethical issue arises; if news coverage is attempting to offer a public service right now, these existing techniques are not what is best suited for achieving that goal.

Let me wrap up my remarks by offering what I view as a really important and valuable possibility for a path forward that in some community news outlets is already taking hold, which is called a solidarity approach. First and foremost, a solidarity approach to reporting is not about putting a happy spin on a global pandemic. I would doubt that there's even one that we would find as a legitimate priority right now, but what it *is* about is locating hope in paths forward, articulated by the communities most adversely affected by the status quo. We hear this day in and day out, that coronavirus has disproportionately affected Black and Brown communities in poverty, and yet I find a very small number of stories that actually speak to those communities in poverty other than obituaries. And obituaries are a genre of reporting, those of you who have taken or teach intro to journalism, that's one of the mainstays, but it's insufficient for understanding what this community spread looks like, why current precautions are not enough to stop the spread, and what would help these communities.

That may mean that certain setups around who is an essential worker and what protections they have or housing needs that are required to not spread the virus when you come home, but to be able to isolate even if you are in a five-person family with one bedroom which is quite common in the Bay area, particularly in lower income families. So really centering what it is these communities have experienced, and what they need to not just sit back and watch in a spectator fashion as these numbers continue to rise. The last thing I'll say with a solidarity approach is that instead of prioritizing officials as having the ability to tell truth, which in the United States we have certainly called into question quite a lot over these last four years, instead of that a solidarity approach prioritizes what Robert White called a public cultural truth, which is still a matter of truth, but it's about arguing that the standard for truth is that a claim cannot be true if, and these are White's words, "if it somehow denies or destroys another person's lived experience."

If someone comes to you and says you know what, you were not in the ethics panel today, and you absolutely were, then a standard of public cultural truth would say that is a lie, as opposed to saying well if an official said it then maybe we'll give it some credence. Right now, much of journalism in the United States is getting bogged down in amplifying misinformation and then debunking it, which is not serving anything and contributing to that process of desensitization. So I'll just end there by saying that with a solidarity approach, we can find paths forward not by ingeniously learning to solve global problems alone, but instead listening to people

with the most experience based on what they've been living for these last several months. Thank you.

Aneurin Bosley: Thank you very much Anita, very interesting. I would like to get things started here. I think the idea of the solidarity approach is very interesting, and I'm wondering whether you think that in journalism ethics, there's always a tension between traditional conceptions of certain ideals, which of course Stephen has written extensively about this in the context of objectivity, the traditional ideas of attachment and neutrality and non-advocacy and those kinds of things. I'm curious to know how you think about reconciling a solidarity approach that seems to be somewhat more advocacy oriented, and where that bumps up against some of the traditional conceptions of journalistic ideals?

Anita Varma: That's a fantastic question. I actually was just teaching yesterday about this question of advocacy and journalism: are they overlapping spheres, are they tangential, or are they one in the same? I should note here that my Ph.D. adviser was Ted Glasser, so the next thing I'm going to say should probably be cited to him, that all journalism ultimately advocates for something. It might advocate simply that you need to be informed of what the status quo is. It might advocate for a return to more golden times. It might advocate for radical change in the direction of greater equality and equity in a society. That is my starting point for my normative conception of journalism.

In my own research, I focus very much on cases where journalists have said objectivity does not apply and it would be egregious to suggest that it should. One example of that is coverage of homelessness, where the journalists who I've spoken to and interviewed in-depth have all noted that objectivity, in many cases where they're covering local issues, they do keep that in mind, but not in the case of homelessness. We see that with ongoing issues, often those that have a very large magnitude where there is some kind of consensus that the status quo is not really defensible.

In the case of coronavirus, what was really fascinating to me at the start, in April, at least the start in many parts of the world, were a number of pieces, both editorial and features as well as the hybrid model of getting away from breaking news, but slightly more long term, that called for flattening the curve, and in an op-ed context, you can see that there'd be opinions about that certainly. However, in the features setting, it was fascinating to me the coverage that we started to see in national news outlets urging and arguing that this is a fact that we can indeed work together, all of us, to flatten the curve, and that worked in the United States in large measure, and is a great example of civic solidarity, so this draws on Byerts and Latina's conception of civic solidarity that says we need to stand in solidarity with each other, because what I do today may well affect my neighbour and so I have an obligation accordingly.

And those kinds of obligations, particularly natural disasters, in wartime reporting, many US journalists, I should specify that too as my scope, they are willing and actually in some cases they view it as a moral onus on themselves to set aside neutrality, to set aside concerns about appearing unbiased, to instead say we will be biased in the public interest.

Aneurin Bosley: I was thinking as you were addressing that issue about the idea of the political conflict that's going on in the United States, and as a kind of half-American myself, I am saddened and sympathize, but presumably expressing a positive attitude towards the preservation of democracy, notwithstanding Churchill's reservations about democracy, would be another example of an advocacy that's presumably been built into journalism for a long time. I'm also wondering, I'm pretty sure that we have some journalism students in attendance today, and so I also wonder if I could ask you about the conception of truth that you outlined there is very interesting.

In journalism ethics, truth is expressed or the ideal of truth is expressed in different ways, either a high regard for the truth or a respect for the truth, seeking the truth. I'm wondering, in this context, how you discussed truth with students that acknowledges how philosophically complicated the notion is, and depending on whether you're a pragmatist, as I believe Stephen is, or whether you're an idealist or a rationalist, truth may even actually be unachievable in most cases. I'm wondering how you navigate that with your students, the conception of truth in the context of the solidarity approach that you're describing?

Anita Varma: Absolutely. I think it's truly important to call attention to the ways in which this gets into complicated terrain. But my answer for journalism students, and for my own students, is that this draws on both critical race studies and feminist studies, and a conception of standpoint epistemology, of grounded conceptions of the person who has lived this, has insight into what this is that cannot be achieved or secondhandedly offered by someone who's standing outside the house. One example of this was in a Reuters report that won several awards before this was getting a lot of attention, which was the genocide of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, and there was a longer series about first, is genocide happening and the denials that it was happening, and second the fact that people who are Rohingya Muslims were escaping on boats and then they would be captured and put into both camps and human labour camps in neighbouring countries, including Thailand.

Initially, it was all denial. The officials first said there's no genocide happening. Second, no one is getting on a boat and third, when they get on a boat, they're just fine when they get to these other places. So, none of the above. These two Reuters reporters, they understood that was the claim, they also believed that there was more going on, and rather than reporting those denials as truth, they went instead into a place that they had heard rumours had one of these camps, there was nothing to be seen on maps. They got on their bikes, they rode their bikes through a jungle and came across a camp. They took pictures of it, they interviewed people there. They came back to the same government officials, and asked, "How do you account for this?" And those government officials looked at these camps and said, "These do not exist".

That is the opposite of truth. I can't pantomime the emoji any better, but it's astonishing to me how simple it is, to say that journalism needs to speak truth to power. Certainly I'm a big fan of that, but whose truth are journalists willing to stand with and for? I think it needs to be what is happening in people's lives that they have an embodied experience of, rather than deference to structural arrangements that may make it possible or plausible to have a preferred version of truth that insulates certain political aims.

Aneurin Bosley: Thank you very much. It's positively Orwellian, the situation that you're describing. I have one question here in the Q and A, so I think I'll ask this question and then we'll wrap up this one and sadly bid you adieu. This is a question from Dawson Clark, and he says, "Thank you for the comments. Can you expand on how we can better centre the experience and analytical perspectives of those adversely affected by the status quo? Are there techniques or structures that you find more effective than others?"

Anita Varma: Thank you so much for that question. The technique is what I call radical inclusion, and my students at Berkeley are always very quick to ask me, "Why is that radical?" It's only radical compared to what we often get in status quo coverage, so that's a relative term. But radical inclusion means that fundamentally the main cornerstones of reporting stay the same, so still sourcing, still interviewing and still framing. Those fundamentals have not changed with a solidarity approach. With radical inclusion, starting at sourcing, instead of beginning with officials, we would begin with the people most affected. Let's say we're interested in looking at the impact of COVID on Black and Brown communities living under the poverty line. There's plenty of frank numbers that we can use to locate where those communities are, and then start with what their experiences have been.

Certainly not to expel officials from the narrative, or to cherry pick which official we like today, but to then go to those officials with what we've learned from the folks directly affected or directly subjected to current conditions, to ask them questions that are shaped by that insight. And then as a second step, in terms of those interviews, marginalized people are often asked by journalists, "How do you feel about that? How did that make you feel? When your child was shot, when your husband died unable to breathe on the way to the hospital, how did you feel?" Without being asked, what do you think, and what would help going ahead?

That question is very, very rare. And again, it's not a radical question. People ask me, as an academic when I'm interviewed, they rarely ask me how I feel about anything. They ask me what I think about it, and it's that same very simple question, "What do you think, and what do you wish could happen next?" Journalists are regularly willing to amplify the views of credentialed, if you want to assume a Ph.D. is a credential, but assume that credentials mean that your thoughts are somehow now valid to be included. But the radical inclusion approach, we would still include the emotional turmoil of course, because that's part of what makes this newsworthy, but also looking at what are your perspectives? What is the analysis of what needs to happen? In many cases, it's quite simple. We need gloves, masks and face shields and we don't have access to them, as one example.

And then the final step is with framing. This came up quite a lot with George Floyd's death unfortunately, and with Breonna Taylor's death. The question of is this a story of an individual named George Floyd and an individual named Breonna Taylor, or is this a story of a system that is working to both oppress and murder Black people across the United States? That second story is very difficult to tell if you've only spoken to people involved in the particular case, and asked the questions of them, but once we've expanded out to communities most directly and adversely affected in many cases, a larger picture comes into view, if there is a larger picture.

In cases where there's not a larger picture, there are still isolated incidents in the world. Journalists would also be able to assess that as well. So the three prongs are very much the same as what we already teach and already do in journalism, but the devil is in the details of how inclusive what happens within those ends up being with the radical inclusion approach.

Aneurin Bosley: Thank you very much for that question Dawson. I know that you have to get to a class Anita, so we thank you very much for joining us. This has been very, very interesting, and stay safe.

Anita Varma: Thank you all. Be well.

Aneurin Bosley: Now we'll return to a somewhat more conventional approach, so we're going to hear from Stephen next, and then we'll hear from Pat. At the end of that, we'll open up the virtual floor to question. I will turn things over to you Stephen.

Stephen Ward: Hello again everyone and thank you Anita. That was a really terrific speech and I may be more ponderous because I have slides and text, but hopefully not too much. Anita raises incredible issues that are very complicated. She said, "We will be biased in the public interest," which defines a lot of what I've been writing about plainly. First of all, journalism ethics is the study and application of norms for the responsible use of the freedom to publish. It has been going through a difficult time for some time, and it didn't start with the pandemic. It began at the end of the twentieth century, with a media revolution placing publishing tools in the hands of the many. It was, at the time, called the democratization of media, and now it's just called a crisis of fake news.

Responsible reporting now seems to get lost amid the cacophony of angry voices. Today, journalism ethics makes a difficult transition from a pre-digital, non-global ethics for professionals to a digital, global ethics for anyone. Basic principles have been challenged or ignored, technology has created ethical issues we've never envisaged and were not envisaged by the code writers at the beginning of the last century. Journalism ethics today is a fragmented archipelago of islands where people differ on what media should be. There are today three issues that were not evident at the turn of the century, and one is the need for an ethic for reporting global issues, such as war, immigration and yes, a pandemic. Little is said in codes about such global responsibilities.

The second issue is how to respond to extreme groups and rigid partisans happy to see plural liberal democracy fail, if only their ideology will prevail. So how should journalists report on hate speech, on demagogues, how much do we understand the causes of unreasonable public, in terms of history, evolution, psychology, and what media triggers encourage people to adopt what I call the enemy stance? And the third issue is how governments and other groups undermine public opinion, with deep fake videos, and many other new means in a global war of misinformation. This cauldron of macro-problems means we need a society-wide macro-resistance or response to detox the public sphere and defend democracy. We need a rethink of ethics on three levels, a reform of its moral ideology, what its aims and stance are. A reform of ethical content, its norms and new practices. And a reform of the ethical structures that hold media users accountable.

There are many things to talk about. I'll focus on only one thing, which is structural change, and one idea only, something I call public participatory ethics. Since the origin of modern journalism ethics in the early twentieth century, media ethics has been a creature of professionals. Professional journalism was the mediator between the world and the public, and ethics belonged in a sense to the professionals. I know, I lived in this system. It determined what norms to accept, and how they were updated and enforced. Ethics was a professional, directed form of self-regulation. Today, even if this model worked perfectly, it would not address the many problems in our digital universe. Media content is of course produced outside professional newsrooms, and how we would restrain intolerant voices online is a very tough question.

We also face global information issues that professional journalists cannot, by themselves, solve, such as robotic disinformation programs during elections. So, I propose that we perhaps just change the model a bit. We think of media ethics not as a code enforced by professionals, although that is part of it, but as collective ethical activity to maintain a healthy public sphere. Ethics has always been a doing, practical and social, anticipating norms that make cooperation among people with different interests possible. What I mean by public participatory ethics is also an activity, based on three notions.

First, ethics is both a right and a responsibility. It is for me a responsibility of all citizens, not just the mainstream media, and not just government regulations. It also is a right of citizens to have a meaningful say in the performance of their media system. Media ethics should be collective advocacy for health, a media system that is reliable, inclusive, widely owned, fulfills important information functions and promotes deliberative democracy. And that's where I touch up with Anita. In 2020, to do media ethics is to advocate for the maintenance of trusted channels of information. Media ethics is an ethic of digital democracy.

Second, media ethics should be collaborative. We need new organizations and structures that allow groups to work together for democratic community. Therefore, we need to connect across many boundaries, including academia, schools and media, information professionals like librarians, media councils, media foundations, NGOs with an interest in good media, such as advocates for human rights. We can readily think about specific changes that would improve news media, such as improving the fact checking by individual reporters, and such improvements are very laudable but I don't see them as sufficient in this crisis. We need to act together, creatively.

Third, media ethics is open and participatory in my view, or it should be. It includes an informed and structured participation by the public, that rises and raises media ethics above the level of ad-hoc complaints from outside the media system, and social media attacks on people inside the system. By involving public and institutions, ethics would not be so dependent on the frankly varying commitment of media owners and social media behemoths. So how might this work? Here are just a few ideas.

We can think about these news structures, some of them anyway, as virtual hubs where coalitions work. These structures could be anchored in agencies with already a knowledge of media, schools of journalism, centres for ethics, leading

news organizations, and for the sake of just argument and your imagination, let's pretend we create something called the Canadian Coalition for Media Excellence. An umbrella for coordinating ethical activity that I'm talking about. What would this centre do, or perhaps I should say what would these centres do? The slide identifies three areas of activity. Evaluate media, educate about media, and create and approve guidelines for practice. Evaluation means review and critique of public media. It means exposing unreliable sources and fake news, and in this way I envisage a sort of fixed estate, if you know your history, which monitors public uses of media and raises awareness about media concentration and other issues.

One project would be to create a national online centre for monitoring news content and providers. Its public face would be a high-profile site or sites, well-known to the public as a trusted place to check media sources and debate media practice. Among the coalition's functions would be not just fact checking, but opinion checking, the discussion of major interpretations of what's happening. It could maintain a registry of reliable and unreliable sources, it could create a national annual state of media report. There's no end to what could be done. And this multi-disciplinary network would be anchored in the coalition of, and this is just an idea, several journalism schools at once, a centre for democracy, and aided by a fact-checking organization. The aim of this activity of education is to create students and citizens who are informed, critical evaluators of media.

In this view, coalitions would lobby the education system and government to develop teaching in schools, starting at an early age. Topics would include how people use their media devices, cyber bullying, troll intimidation, exchange of pornography and yes, the creation of news and fake news. It should be a central part of education in Canada. In a world where media defines reality, and the coalitions could develop teaching modules to use not only in the classroom, but in workshops organized by student groups. Also, as in Europe, working journalists could go into schools to help with the discussions.

Create and improve refers to collaboration on professional media ethics, media workers, ethicists, citizens, to create guidelines for new problems, new issues, such as new technology like virtual reality, and for coverage of emerging social issues. For example, why should practice be improved to report on hate speech? People gathered virtually in town hall meetings, social media and citizen assemblies could engage these issues, confronting their media systems, and these coalitions would not replace existing structures, like public editors and news councils. Hopefully, these structures would be part of the collaboration.

Now developing this system would be audacious and difficult, but the good news is that many of the elements are in place. To those who worry about the resources and who does it, I point to the slide to remind us of what sources exist. In North America alone, there are codes of ethics, guides on how to evaluate the performance of media systems, there are hundreds of media schools with teachers, scholars and students, dozens of centres for media democracy and lots of fact-checking organizations, plus NGOs fighting online misinformation. And then there are links to Europe and beyond. Already, collaborative, creative work is underway. Here's one example.

A Canadian journalism forum on violence and trauma recently acted as one of these hubs for journalists, news outlets, psychologists and mental health groups to come together and the result was a revised handbook on how to report on mental illness, especially suicide. Meanwhile, the various schools of media in Canada, educators are leading projects for innovative forms of journalism. We can also learn from Europe, as I've discovered, where there are many coalitions of NGOs and groups who are already using online techniques to combat religious hatred and racism. Also, there's room for further collaboration between academia and journalists. To take one example, Harvard University produces a journalists' review, a weekly digest of the best research, the must-reads for journalists covering the latest complex issues, and it has launched its misinformation review.

And two days ago, the Shorenstein Center at Harvard released this media manipulation handbook, with theory, cases, methods, all about how manipulation happens. Once again, an example of research relevant to our crisis. Almost everywhere I turn I see a possible collaboration. Maybe I'm delusional, but I do. Not long ago, I gave a talk at the centre for research and reasoning argumentation and retort at the University of Windsor. I suggested that they could use their expertise practically to help citizens distinguish good reasoning from rhetoric that manipulates your mind. There's never been a better time for them to get into the game.

Meanwhile, I don't deny and I certainly affirm that technology is not all bad. It can perhaps help us and support our macro-resistance. On this slide, you'll see an example of what a media start-up in New York called pressland.com is attempting to do. I don't understand the technology, but basically the aim is to use big data, computer technology, to track the history and reliability of almost every major news story in the country every day, so that's what you would see, an example for what a citizen would see when tracking down a story. I don't see the problem with responding to our crisis as a no resources issue, because that just shuts down discussion. I think of it as how resources are to be employed, which I think opens up ideas and discussion.

Where there are practical problems about funding and organizing my ideal platonic participatory system, take it from someone who has created a Center for Journalism Ethics from scratch. But the same can be said of any new idea, and we'll never know what is possible until we try. So there's no one solution for our crisis in my view, no one technological fix. And there are cultural issues that I haven't even mentioned. We have an enormous moral choice before us. Between carrying out our public discourse in reasonable tolerant ways, or to join the unreasonable in-your-face gang. And we can ask, have we built a society where people prefer to shout and believe what they want to believe? Is the idea of deliberation amongst public's now an illusion? If so, then no amount of bleating about media ethics will make a difference. However, this may be, I still think our best response is a convergence of creative ideas.

My idea today is just to give you this sketch of an idea of how we in Canada, and beyond, can come together at a broader level, higher level of organization for these great issues. I can't solve these issues, but I think that this new and greater civic structure would help us to react to and to go forward with what I call macro-resistance. The era of simply complaining about the big bad media is over, the day

when media ethics was a spectator sport, of critiquing the mainstream players on the field, that has passed. Today, there is no “the media,” and we are all players, and as democratic, digital citizens, I don’t think we’re powerless if we act in a common cause. Thank you.

Aneurin Bosley: Thank you very much Stephen. A very ambitious plan indeed, but that’s very interesting. Lots to think about there. I am going to pass things over to Pat Perkel, welcome.

Pat Perkel: Thanks for the opportunity to be here and thanks for that Stephen, it’s really a big global picture. I’m going to bring things a little bit more down to where the “rubber hits the road” level right now. Just in case you don’t know what the News Media Council is, it’s in the old vernacular, it’s a press council. It’s a voluntary, self-regulatory organization that’s meant to serve as a forum for complaints against published news and opinion, and also to promote ethical journalistic standards.

I like to say that we serve the industry in terms of promoting ethical, good standard journalism, and we serve the public in being an organization that they can come to for dealing with the complaints about accuracy, framing, context, opportunity to respond, things like that. But interesting, when you speak Stephen, we also have a mandate to a certain level, to promote awareness of news and awareness of the news media about standards, and to that effect we’ve been trying to work more with academic institutions and have J-schools and universities as members, so as a collaborative venture, not the full scope of what you’re talking about but toward that way.

People, journalists, turn to experts as Anita said, maybe too often they turn to the experts alone, but we would like to make that expertise more available to the news media and therefore to the public, so that’s something that’s an interesting crossover there. At any rate, maybe just to talk a little bit more about COVID, what from the vantage point of having ethics, our journalistic standards are not just the standards, it’s to have the ethics too. So it’s not just to do the right thing, but to do the right thing from a human face.

Much as Anita was speaking about, to be more than just the detached person that recites numbers or talks to the authorities but, Stephen you talked about the engaged objectivity, to understand that there are people involved here, and the status quo is what it is, but it’s not necessarily the only thing. Maybe we need to take a step back and make sure we’re including those other voices to be fair and to be ethical.

Some of the ways that has come about with COVID is just in the basic work of doing journalism. How do we do it differently? We don’t go to scrums anymore, we don’t casually just meet somebody in the hall of city hall. To meet people, communication is more controlled and that can be difficult in terms of not having the same opportunity to dig in there and get answers that you want, so there’s more pressure just to take the authority line, you don’t have the chance to see people.

But people are innovative, they do things. There’s still CPAC so people tweet from CPAC. We had a complaint that somebody tweeted that the tweet was wrong, and that’s more of a case of it wasn’t wrong, but the public has to come along as well and be able to follow that kind of journalism, to know that it is a tweet, it’s not the whole story, just like a headline isn’t the whole story.

So, the restricted access that journalists have to authorities is a problem. The lockdown has imposed disruption. Another way we have to look at it again, similar to what Anita was talking about, is empathy. She talked about solidarity, she talked about the authority voice, we talk about having diversity. We've seen a lot in the Canadian media in the last seven to eight months I think since the pipeline coverage at the beginning, the end of last year, really brought out things like viewpoint, protestors, one person's protestor is another person's land defender. That was to us a really striking thing.

Then that opened the whole debate about who are you taking as your authority when you're talking to First Nations, when you're talking to communities that you don't know about, and how do you deal with, how do you find out the right people? Is there a right person? Maybe the problem is it's more complex, you don't have to solve the problem as a journalist, you just have to explain it properly so that people can come to their own understanding.

A big issue that COVID has brought, same issues I guess, but they been brought to life in a different way, privacy. And information. Again, in terms of health information, that gets into an area we've heard about already, about the public good compared to the personal right, and that's been a challenging one for privacy I think, and for reporting under COVID. We've had complaints, early days of the pandemic, we get a complaint that a public figure was named and somebody would object to their health information being reported that they've tested positive for COVID.

Is that strictly true? That's where the ethics come in, and the judgment, the news judgment, the journalistic discretion. If it's a public figure, yeah, you probably do want to know and you probably have a right to know if they've tested positive. If it's a staff person at your grocery store, your convenience store, it isn't the same assessment that you make. And I think these are important things for journalists to keep in mind. It's tempting to report the numbers, the information is all there, is it information you should use in every case?

Again, you have to think about the impact. What does that do to the community? Is it making an individual suffer inordinately when really your story for the public good can be told without putting that person under more scrutiny or possible stigmatization.

COVID has also brought about a big awareness on scientific and numeric literacy that journalists need to have, because as Anita was speaking about, the number fatigue, especially numbers we can't understand. Not all of us can understand. What does it mean, the tests, the positivity, what do all these things mean? Can they be put in a context so that people feel that they're getting reliable numbers, trustworthy numbers, so that people can govern themselves accordingly, so that people can trust or not trust the interventions the government is putting on our lives.

Again, a complaint we had was that a graphic explaining the case numbers was wrong, and when we looked at it, it wasn't wrong. It was a logarithmic graph, so it was a matter of understanding that relation and should a different graph have been used in telling the story? Should there have been an explainer about that? How do we tell the story without introducing that element that's going to make somebody mistrust, again, what you're trying to present as a reliable source of information.

The questions about privacy, I think, is it culturally different for different groups. Is privacy regarded differently if you're living, for example, in an inter-generational family where, I guess we thought about this a lot with schools reopening. If it's safe to send kids back to school, then what about kids that come back to houses where maybe their grandparents or even great-grandparents live with them? How do you tell that story without bothering people, while respecting them as part of your community?

Anita talked about disadvantaged areas, and not knowing the people. Some places where there've been COVID hotspots have been labelled as "it's the young people." We had stories about people gathering and being called COV-idiot, and being stigmatized either because they can gather freely because they're of a wealth and a background that they're safe, or stigmatized because they don't have that option and one area was, I remember it went from being stigmatized or the blame was being given to the young people, then it was no it wasn't the young people, it was that they were service industry jobs, but no it wasn't that, it was because it was an area with a lot of Airbnbs and travellers coming in.

So just the care that's needed about reporting that, everything seems to be a moving target with COVID, and that's just another moving target we have to be careful about. Opinion writing, headlines, these are always questions and things that attract a lot of complaints, and it's just increased the focus on it now with COVID, for example.

A headline that says, "Pub closed with COVID case," received a complaint because another pub owner thought it was detrimental to his business, or that people would think it was his business. Even a headline has to be carefully written so that people don't feel disadvantaged by information that the public needs to know. There is a public interest in knowing the information, so those are some of the things.

In summary, I think COVID has raised new ethical questions; for example, I think we all know the case about the registry of people who tested positive was compiled and then we found out the police were using that registry just to trawl through. What would you do about using a story that came out of that illegal use of that information?

You should leave the story alone. There's still questions on unpublishing material that people find uncomfortable or disadvantageous or whatever reason. Source remorse is the biggest reason people request stories be taken down. It was never a very good reason before, it's no better reason now, with COVID, but there have to be considerations and people have to know how they can ask about that, and what your policies are as a publication.

But I think COVID raises new questions that the day-to-day job of doing journalism depends on the same standards, and I think those standards haven't really changed. I don't think the ethics of trying to live with the spirit of what is done, rather than the letter of how you do it, and the ethics of trying to be a human being who is looking at the public good, not the status quo, but the public good, remains.

Aneurin Bosley:

All right, thank you very much Pat. There's lots of really interesting things to consider there. I have a question that I think relates to both presentations, and that is I guess kind of the elephant in the room here, which is the social media platforms. They play an out-sized role and I guess we have evidence that people are increasingly getting

their news diet from things that they encounter in their news feeds on Facebook and Twitter and so on.

I'll start with you Pat, in particular, I'm wondering whether you think about the way in which the social media algorithms function and, I guess is it fair to say, it's reasonably well established that they are really designed to reinforce existing ideas and beliefs and so on, the so-called filter bubble. I'm just wondering, is there a danger that this impacts the way in which people think about the news media and what their role really is? Is there a risk that the sense among people in the communities is becoming distorted? Are there correctional measures? Is that something that we should be worried about?

Pat Perkel:

We haven't done research to look at this, so I will just say that given our sense and what we read and discuss, yes there's no doubt that your social media gives you what your social media thinks you believe, so there's a shutting down of the conversation and Stephen you mentioned that.

I actually wonder, it's just a thought going back to the earlier decades, when there wasn't a distinction between news and opinion and we drifted very, very badly then into yellow journalism, and I wonder if we got away from that, and if the impact of social media is pushing hard towards a society where people don't want to know what they don't believe.

I agree, there is a concern that the media is fighting a very tough battle against people whose minds are made up and cannot be convinced differently. What to do about that is a pretty huge discussion, but I wonder, some of the things Stephen that you've talked about, and some of our work with trying to work with academic institutions, I always believe more information helps, rather than less. How to get that to people who just want to read a headline and know the whole story by reading a headline, it's a bit of a challenge.

Aneurin Bosley:

Stephen, I don't know if you have anything you want to weigh in on that particular point. I'm also curious on whether you have a view on that particular question, but then also the role of social media in this new collaborative system that you're envisaging, and how that is managed. It seems the objectives, and I don't want to pick on Facebook and Twitter and others, like YouTube, per se, they kind of are what they are, and they're not going out and proclaiming that they're providing important information to people the way journalists are.

Nevertheless, they do have an impact, and how do you think about how to deal with that challenge, in creating the kind of system that you're describing?

Stephen Ward:

Thanks Pat for bringing the issue down to earth. My view on this is that what I call toxic social media, according to my definition, things that are unreliable, false, blatantly partisan, extreme, is not going to go away. Unless you put in place a regulatory system, which democracies would feel very uncomfortable with, which means just shutting down contrary voices.

Pat Perkel:

That's the problem.

Stephen Ward:

Yes. And my view is that the reason I've stressed structural reform, and that's a big word that academics like to use, what I mean is just let's do things differently. One

of the ways that I can see is why I stressed education, is the more we know about our media, how it works from an early age, the more we can get into and defend ourselves against the worst abuses of social media. It won't be perfect. And so certainly, education is very important.

The other part of critiquing media, where we have a source website, and places for people to go where they can identify what those organizers think are reliable and unreliable sources, I know there's an issue about how do you define those, but that's what we absolutely need. We need to know the provenance, as it were. Remember in art history, you know the food chain, you need to know where this story came back, and given the technology, given working together, that would help.

I really believe that we don't know, as journalists, and as public, exactly how social media works; how the disinformation happens. So the more we as journalists can know, as the study out of Harvard shows how is this operating, the more we can fight it.

There are, again, on the downside, as you pointed out what I would call cultural problems, that I'm not sure we can change. If people simply don't have the attention span to want to read a decent long article, if they would rather be enamored with the pop and fizz, and feel of online, that in fact is going to be a very difficult problem. But at the same time, I don't think we should simply throw all of social media into the trash can. There is a lot of great online work being done, inventive, and so on.

And from my view, it's the question of how do we distinguish between the two? If I want to read about human rights around the world right now, I certainly will read the mainstream media, the things I consider valid. But you know what? There are all types of human rights NGOs that are doing fantastic journalism in the field. So, it's both good and it's bad, and I don't think we should be technological pessimists, or technological optimists. That's just too easy. We're stuck in the middle. We've got to sort of organize our way out of this. I'll stop now.

Aneurin Bosley:

Thank you very much. I have a question from Sarah, and this question for both of you. She asks what thoughts do you have about fostering that public engagement/participation in the building and evolution of ethical standards? She says, "I've worked in newspapers where getting a single, local letter in a week was a win." Who wants to take a stab at that one first?

Stephen Ward:

I'll go first Pat. I don't think that if you set up the right systems where people feel they can comment on their media, and learn more about it, I think a lot of people would do so. I don't think you'd be hoping for one letter, you might get too much, you might get an avalanche. But I'm also thinking of structured conversations here. I'm not just talking about a social media site where people hammer on about "Did you see that story? Let's get a hashtag, let's go after that media site," that's not what I'm talking about. That's what I don't like.

When I said structured public participation, I meant that you have a credible host, an academic institution and maybe other agencies, who host the conversation, and people will enter in, for example, through citizen assemblies, and other mechanisms. They have to inform themselves of the issue, they have to know what the principles of journalism are that we're talking about and why they do or do not apply. And then

we talk about what would we want from our media in these circumstances.

I know that sounds idealistic, but it actually is something that's really important. I'm not talking about people just commenting off the top of their heads, without some sort of information structure.

Aneurin Bosley: Pat, I don't know if you want to add to that?

Pat Perkel: Sure, just turn it around a little bit from the journalism side, again we're thinking a lot and working towards getting more diversity of voices, making sure we're not just going to the authorities and saying what they said. Looking at the people who are affected and we've heard a lot from people who say develop better sources, develop sources in the community, learn who your First Nations community is, who your Black neighbourhood or your lower income neighbourhood is, develop your sources there. Ask for their participation.

You will become better known to them, as they become better known to you, and you're more likely to get people volunteering stories and participation in that way. It's a slow-building way of doing things, but I think it would lead to some authentic journalism, that may yield participation.

Stephen Ward: Could I just add to that?

Aneurin Bosley: Absolutely, please.

Stephen Ward: What I found, I agree with all of that Pat, that's been the secret of great journalism for a long time, is that you get beyond the numbers, into people's lives, and what Anita was saying was actually both new but not that new. First of all, compassion fatigue is a well-known phenomenon, and she was talking about a version of that, and it's good she brought it up.

The other point, I find, is that there's a lot of things called engagement journalism, community engagement journalism, sounds very much like solidarity idea and it's very important. For example, we now have young non-mainstream journalists setting up websites, for example in Hawaii, in Honolulu, they'll actually go down and live and spend time with people in poor shacks and learn exactly how even a byline change or a bylaw change in the city's zoning might help. It's down to that, but you can't know that, unless you give up the old notion that we have to be neutral journalists in every case.

Neutrality has its place, but in my view it's overblown. What we're fighting in the United States, and I think Canada, is just when you want journalists to do something that's democratically and community valid, up goes the red flag of neutrality to stop you from doing that. And I think that you shouldn't. Journalists always have values. We always have goals. Even if it's just to inform people neutrally, that's a goal. And so let's get away from that, and let's talk instead about how do we use the best and vigorous methods to do stories that help our community.

Values and emotions, we shouldn't be scared of them. I was a war reporter, and there's no way in the world that what I saw I could not be more swayed, and I wasn't. The point was not to let it overcome you, or bias your reporting, but the emotion made you passionate. You did even better journalism. This old dualism that exists

way back in journalism, it's emotion versus cold, cold facts. Well, that's what I'm fighting. It's still hanging around.

For example, when Trump, a year and a half ago called for women of colour to "Go home," CNN and a whole bunch of people twisted themselves in professional pretzels not saying that is a racist statement. They called it euphemisms on CNN that you couldn't believe, like it's racist provoking, perhaps racist discourse. No, it was racist, frankly. The reason they didn't want to do that is because they're thinking about the reaction from their audiences, but also the doctrine that we have to be neutral.

And I'm not throwing out objectivity. I'm just saying we have to have richer journalism ethics to work in today's world.

Aneurin Bosley: I'm wondering, just in that vein, you both mentioned Anita's distinction between solidarity and empathy, and I'm just wondering does the more solidarity-oriented approach suggest that it should also be more solutions oriented? I know that solutions-oriented journalism bubbles up from time to time as a doctrine that maybe we should aspire to. I'm wondering what you think about that idea?

Stephen Ward: Pat, do you want to go first?

Pat Perkel: I've already said I don't think a journalist always has to solve an issue. I don't think that's always the job. I think we have to give the reader and the public credit for intelligence and empathy. I don't think we should forget, just because we are inundated with ugliness that there is also good out there. I also think it's only right to let a community or a group develop its own solutions. It's not up to the journalist to develop, it's for them to develop the solutions. Maybe they just need to be heard.

I like the notion of solidarity, I call it empathy, I don't know if there's a little bit of a distinction or not, but yes, sometimes there'll be solutions that should be pointed out but sometimes the solution is you just have to describe a situation so people can make their own.

Stephen Ward: I agree with that.

Aneurin Bosley: Thanks for that question Sarah. She was also kind of getting at the idea that at people don't generally know how the sausage is made. To most people, a newsroom is a bit of a black hole and they have no idea how stories come about, and how they're written and how they're edited. I'm wondering if her question is also getting at the need for a little bit more transparency about what the process is actually like.

Stephen Ward: When I started journalism ethics 15 years ago, people were talking about the sausage, and I can tell you, you'll have no credibility as a newsroom if you're not transparent today, I wouldn't say universally, but majorly. The whole point about the sausage was raised, it was a doctrine or an idea in the time when newsrooms were all powerful and they didn't have to open up their black box. Why should they, such a powerful institution in our society, unlike every other major association which comes under public pressure?

I think this has happened, people have seen what's going on inside newsrooms, and

there's been some dismay, but overall, in the long run, I think it's good to do all this. But again, it goes back to my view of self-regulation. Some newsrooms or owners might say no, we don't want to do that, then you're back to ethics being regulated by the professionals.

Aneurin Bosley: I have a question from an anonymous attendee. What are some of the ethics that journalists must uphold in the risk communication of the pandemic? How do they balance public interest and fear mongering in their reportage? Another good question. Pat do you want to take the first crack at that one.

Pat Perkel: So, fear mongering isn't journalism. Let's start there. It's not ethical. Interestingly, the European Alliance, the European press councils, just did a study on their experience reporting in COVID, and it is a violation of standards with some of the press councils in Europe to sensationalize, and sensationalization includes even giving a hint about a false cure. You have to be quite careful in your writing to stick quite strictly to the truth. I thought that was interesting, even something that promised a false hope, false cure, is obviously unethical.

It comes back to is this question of sources again. Whether what you're reporting is from a credible source, is it properly framed, is it in the right context? You have to be careful, and I think that again, this is tough territory for a journalist because it's numbers and science, and I'm not saying no journalists know it, obviously they do. But we tend to be words and stories people and when we go into numbers and science, we need to make sure we understand it first.

We're lucky if we can find a source who can translate that for us, who can put it into context, make sure if there's provisos don't be afraid to put the provisos in. You're not confusing somebody by explaining the limits of what you're saying. It takes more time, it takes more space, and those are challenges.

Stephen Ward: I think the ethics here are incredibly complicated. I used to teach how to report on science, and I used to have workshops with scientists, so I know the tensions between journalists and scientists and how they see differently on matters. I would point to two things that make the writing very important or difficult.

One is that you're reporting under conditions of uncertainty. You have a science, and scientists who themselves are not absolutely sure what this virus is. Their story will change, their story will evolve. You've got to get across to the people that just because the scientist changed their policy on something, it doesn't mean you lose all faith in the scientist. But that's hard to do, because people in our society have come to believe it's either a fact or it's not a fact, or somebody's waffling means they're not completely certain, then they're unreliable.

You've got to write the story that says look, this is the best they know right now, and have the provisos, the uncertainties, included. You've got to include them in the story. In my view, that's how you inform people properly. Also, I think as a journalist if you're stuck about conflicting messages, political and scientific, of course we've seen that happen, but also conflicting messages between so-called scientific experts. How are you going to figure that out?

I think that's a huge problem, because journalists are not scientists and methodology

may escape them at times. I think what you end up doing is balancing what is called the weight of evidence, or the weight of scientific evidence, as you do in climate change. And that's the best you can do. Where you can tell the people look, this is what either the majority or the best scientists say, and if there's another view that seems to have some credibility, not just that you're going to mention it for balance, then of course that should go in the story.

But I think this is a double whammy problem for the pandemic. Number one, the first whammy is that your story goes out into a public sphere, surrounded and corrupted and in amongst crap, very bad false science. So your message doesn't get unchallenged or untainted, it just sort of gets lost. That's one problem.

The other problem is, as I said, is how do you actually report this stuff? How do you tell people that things are going this way and maybe somebody who's wrong on masks or whatever, and not destroy public confidence in the system.

Pat Perkel: Especially when people are so ready to pull out the conspiracy label.

Stephen Ward: Oh yes.

Pat Perkel: The minute you change something, oh it was a conspiracy about that. It's really a tough question, tough to do it well. But the other thing buried in all of that is that people's health and sometimes lives are at risk in terms of conveying that information. There's a huge ethical pressure to get it right, as right as you can. And so it's a huge responsibility for a journalist to get it as right as they can, with all the provisos, and not end up having somebody think it's just all a conspiracy and so they're not listening to anything.

Aneurin Bosley: It sounds like you're suggesting that journalists practice a good dose of humility, the virtue of humility. Thank you for that question. I have another one here from Ayesha: "How do you suggest a journalist talk about their views on what constitutes a public good? How should you talk to your readership about your bias towards the public good?"

Pat Perkel: That's a great question.

Stephen Ward: Okay, quickly, every journalism ethics depends on a political point of view, that is what the public good is. So how do you talk about it? Well, that depends on what your political view is. If you're like me you're a pluralist, you want a liberal democracy and all that good stuff. All you can do is argue what are the advantages of that for society. In other words, you just make an argument as best you can for that point of view, but be open of course, non-dogmatically open to other stuff.

I'm not sure if the question is about actually writing stories, or just in general.

Aneurin Bosley: She's talking about how you should talk to your readership about your bias towards the public good. I can sort of imagine that maybe there's a social media exchange, or maybe you're on Reddit Ask Me Anything, or even just face-to-face, whenever that returns.

Pat Perkel: I've spoken about being a human. Journalists are not neutral stenographers or

dictaphones, we're people. We have our own experience. We use that experience, it doesn't limit or define you, but it's certainly a component, and I don't think you should be afraid to talk about if you have an expertise because of somewhere you've lived, or somewhere you've studied, a world view because of travels or lived experience.

I don't think you need to be afraid to bring that into a conversation, but of course, your writing has to prove that you can step back from that, and still present the facts that you're given, that you're not determined by who you are, where you've lived, but that can inform part of what you do. It can inform how you see other people, how you hear other people and not to prejudice it, but to inform.

I think you can help people understand that news is written by humans, working in newsrooms, working with organizations, that it's not a conspiracy, it's not a big power, big media. I think it's worthwhile.

Aneurin Bosley: Further to what you're saying, correct me if I'm wrong, it sounds like part of the challenge here is to try and convey ideas in a somewhat more tentative way. I think journalists do have some predilection for wanting to come across as being very factual, presenting things as if this is the way the world is, and just referencing some of the work that Stephen has done in objectivity, that best case scenario here is that we provide a good, well-established, well-evidenced interpretation of events and facts and so forth, the best that we know them.

And I know that could be a challenge, because we have the kind of traditional ethical ideals of balance, neutrality and objectivity and all those things nipping at our heels, while at the same time there's a new emerging media world, where we are expected to be a little bit more honest about our methods, and a little bit more forthcoming about how the sausage is made, and where we're coming from without everybody sounding like it's a big, opinionated free-for-all.

Pat Perkel: By all means, if you're covering a speech or Queens Park, what they said is what they said. It doesn't matter who you are, if that's what was said in a presentation, in a newser, that's it. Sometimes it is just a hard factual story and that's all there is to it.

Aneurin Bosley: Good point. That's a good reminder, thank you. I just want to say thank you very much to all the participants here. Thanks for some very interesting and thought-provoking questions, and thank you very much to Stephen and Pat, this has been a very interesting conversation.

I know we're in a very challenging time when it comes to journalism ethics and we've got a lot to think about, and I thank you for your insight on this. I hope you enjoy the rest of the conference, so stay safe and be well.

JOURNALISM IN THE TIME OF CRISIS



DATA JOURNALISM'S MOMENT

PANEL

Moderator: Aneurin Bosley, Carleton University

Speakers: Alberto Cairo, University of Miami; Joel Eastwood, *The Wall Street Journal*;
Nael Shiab, Radio-Canada; Patti Sonntag, Concordia University

Aneurin Bosley: Welcome everybody. I'm Aneurin Bosley, Assistant Professor in the School of

Journalism and Communication here at Carleton. Before we begin, I do want to acknowledge that Carleton's campus is located on the traditional, unceded territory of the Algonquin nation.

I'm very pleased to be moderating this panel on data journalism. The COVID-19 pandemic has been perhaps a rare example of a hugely important global story that also has significant data implications. In the early days of the pandemic, at least here in North America, we kept getting the public health message about the importance of flattening the curve. And this message itself is an expression of visualized data. With time, case counts, hospital capacities, being plotted on X and Y-axis.

At the same time, the data has presented many challenges for journalists, case counts are to some degree dependent on the availability of testing, data collection methods may be slower, and reliable, visualizing data in responsible and effective ways is a very demanding task, just to name a couple of the challenges. Our panelists are going to help shed light on some of the many aspects of this very important area of journalism.

Let me introduce the panelists. Alberto Cairo is the Knight Chair in Visual Journalism at the School of Communication at the University of Miami and the Director of the Visualization Program at UM Center for Computational Science. He's the author of several books and consults with companies and institutions such as Google and the Congressional Budget Office.

Joel Eastwood is a graphics editor at *The Wall Street Journal*, where he was part of the team that won the 2019 Pulitzer Prize for national reporting. Nael Shiab is an award-winning data reporter who works for CBC/Radio-Canada and is based in Montreal. And Patti Sonntag is the Director of the Institute for Investigative Journalism in the Department of Journalism at Concordia and was the Managing Editor at *The New York Times'* News Services division. Welcome to you all. I am going to hand the virtual floor over to Alberto to get us started.

Alberto Cairo:

Thank you so much. It's an honour to be here, super happy to discuss all these issues. I have a small slide deck prepared with a few examples, but I'm going to try to keep my opening remarks as informal as possible. I think that the pandemic has demonstrated both the value of visualization and has also shown how much common readers appreciate the power of visualization, how much they like data visualization, but it has also demonstrated many other things that I would like to share with you.

Many of the most popular pieces of content ever published by media organizations these days have been data visualizations, and in particular data visualization related to the pandemic. The most viewed story ever published by *The Washington Post* online is actually a piece published around March, which is a simulator of how a pandemic spreads depending on different variables, depending on whether we adopt measures, or we don't adopt measures. How a regular pandemic spreads very quickly became the most viewed piece of content ever in *The Washington Post*.

This is hardly new though. It's not new. I mean, we know that in the past 10 to 15 years, many media organizations have seen through the analytics that data visualization is really popular in general. Actually, I think that it was around June

that there was this story, also in *The Washington Post*, that said that out of the seven most popular stories ever published in *The Washington Post* online, six of them were pieces created by the graphics department of *The Washington Post*, which actually tells you something.

It is like revealing that people really like to see graphics. Readers like to see graphics, information represented graphically and visually. And also this is just an aside, not related to the pandemic itself, but for years, the most popular story ever published by *The New York Times* online was also a data visualization, the famous dialect math. So, readers really like to see these, but there are some differences or there are some lessons that can be learned in the way that we have covered the pandemic or in the way that news organizations have created graphics related to the pandemic.

Perhaps we cannot extract teachings that are really new, but we have emphasized that the importance of certain aspects of data visualization that we knew already, the importance of those old features, the pandemic has made even more visible. For example, the importance of what we call in data visualization, the annotation layer. The annotation layer is essentially the text, the words that we put on top of a graphic in order to emphasize or to highlight or to stress what that graphic truly means.

You mentioned the “flatten the curve” graphic design just a minute ago. When Brian Stelter from CNN presented the flatten on the curve graphic on TV, he didn’t just simply put the graphic on screen and talk about something else. No, he took the time to put himself in front of the graphic and explain to readers, or to viewers in this case, as clearly as possible what it is that the graphic was showing.

Sometimes when we design visualizations, we forget that the ultimate goal of a data visualization is not the graphic per se. The ultimate goal is understanding. And whether you do this through words and through visuals, that doesn’t really matter. And if you can do it through a combination of words and visuals like Brian did in this particular case, you will achieve the best of both worlds.

Again, this is nothing particularly new, the use of the annotation layer. It is only that I think the graphics related to the pandemic have highlighted how relevant it is when we are dealing with complex, uncertain, complicated data, that we journalists understand these data really, really well and then we try to pass that understanding to our readers, something that sometimes cannot really be done with this visualization alone. We also need to use words.

A few months ago, there was an interview with a John Burn-Murdoch, who is one of the data journalists at the *Financial Times*. He said that the most important thing that they do in the database at the *Financial Times* is not the data, it’s not the visualization, those things are certainly important. The most relevant thing that they do is the adding that expert annotation layer to emphasize, to stress, to highlight, to explain what it is that the graphic is actually showing, as a supplement to what the graphic is actually showing.

Another thing that the pandemic has made more visible is the need to expand the visual vocabulary that we use. There are certain types of data, certain types of phenomena that cannot be displayed if it is not through graphics that are traditionally underused in news media. Scatter plots for example. If you want to

show the association between variables, scatter plots are usually the best way to show that, but they are much less usual for a regular reader to see than a bar graph or a line chart. And many editors fear that by using our initial graphic forms, you may confuse people.

My response to that is, if you think that that's the best way to represent your data, but you think that your reader will not understand that graphic, you need to use that graphic anyway, but you better be prepared to explain it. So, something similar could be said about the use of logarithmic scales, which is something that I discussed in an article.

In my latest book, *How Chats Lie*, I describe how to use a logarithmic scale. I wrote the book before the pandemic, long before before the pandemic, unfortunately, and I described how useful algorithmic scale can be at showing rates of change, not necessarily total change, but rate of change. I provided an imaginary case. Let's suppose that you have a couple of gerbils at home and you let them reproduce freely.

How you visualize the different generations, how they grow exponentially. If you show the exponential growth using linear scale, the traditional linear scale, you will never notice that the number of gerbils at home is increasing, it's doubling every generation. You will only notice it after the 25 generation, as that is when it will spike. But when you represent the data in a non-linear fashion, in a non-linear scale, you will see that the number of gerbils multiply every single generation. So you can plan more clearly.

Many organizations have been experimenting, and *El País* from Spain have been letting readers switch back and forth between linear scales and logarithmic scales, and then explaining why algorithmic scale is so important in a case like this, because what really matters in a pandemic is really not the total number of cases. That's incredibly important, obviously, but it's also how fast the pandemic is expanding, how often the number of cases doubles or multiplies by 10, the rate of change and the rate of change very, very often will only be visible. This can only be visualized through a scale that is not necessarily linear.

I also think that we are learning the hard way, by explaining to our readers the limitations of our data. At the very beginning of the pandemic, we had so many graphics that told the total number of cases, total number of deaths without explaining very clearly what that really meant. It's like number of cases confirmed with all these caveats.

It always later during the pandemic that people in media started discussing issues such as, for example, excess deaths. We are just now learning that the number of deaths in the United States is probably not 200,000. It's probably double that, or 150 percent more around 300,000. There are already estimates based on excess deaths compared to previous years, the estimated number of deaths. So COVID-19 deaths are actually much higher.

And it also relates to the issue of how to visualize the uncertainty of our data. I am collecting numerous papers, articles, even free books, about how to explain uncertainty to readers. If you're a journalist, how to visualize that uncertainty so people can understand it is important.

One more thing that I think we are learning the hard way is how to make our data more approachable and less cold. In the past few years, I have been thinking about the difference between what I call cold data and warm data. Cold data is traditional data, which are visualized through line charts, bar graphs, etc., and is extremely useful. We need to keep doing that. Obviously, analytically speaking that's essential, but at the same time, traditional ways to represent information detaches from the human face that that data may have, right?

When we hear the numbers, such as 200,000 people have died, it is hard for a normal human brain to imagine the scope, the size of that number. There is a phenomenon well studied in psychology called quantitative numbers, which is essentially the old saying, "One death is a tragedy. 1,000 deaths becomes a statistic. It becomes an abstract number." So how can we make those numbers more approachable? One of the possible ways that we can do that is through what I call in visualization, the mean layer.

Where am I in the data? This is something that many media organizations are experimenting with already. 99.9 percent of what I say is not particularly original, but I've always tried to put the reader at the centre of the data whenever that is possible. You're showing the distribution of wealth in the United States, for example, and you draw the curve of wealth in the United States, and never just show the curve.

Poor families are here, and very rich families are over here. First, ask your reader, "What is your current wealth?" And the reader will input their wealth. Then you will show the curve and you will show a line and you will tell people that you are here on the curve. You are richer than X percent of the population and I'm poorer than X percent of the population. Once you do that, your story will become more engaging. It will be more widely read, and at the same time, it will also be more informative because human beings understand things better when they are put at our scale.

That's the driving idea behind the latest project that I art directed a few weeks ago. It was published by *The Washington Post*. It also had a Brazilian version that was published before. It tries to visualize what would happen if all deaths of COVID-19 had happened around you. It's a simple idea — I didn't come up with this idea by the way — I just art directed the project. All the kudos and the congratulations should go to the designers of this project, which are credited, a group of Brazilian journalists.

The way that it works is that you simply input your address, and this is where you are sitting right now. And the application says, "Well, imagine now the first person with COVID-19 in the United States was not this person in Washington State. Let's imagine that this person who died of COVID-19 the first one was your neighbour, the person that you see every day when you go to work, getting the newspaper or whatever.

Each one of the dots represents one person. This is all census data, census block data. One week later, 93 other people had died. And the circle is around you gets bigger, if all those deaths had happened around you. Then one month later, almost 13,000 people would have died around you. And the circle around you gets even bigger. You can show the streets to provide a better understanding of the size.

And now the most recent data, more than 220,000 confirmed deaths of COVID-19. The circle will be even bigger, and everyone around 3.2 months, would have died of COVID-19. Probably you're not very familiar with the geography of southwest Miami,

but I am. This is huge. And the most common reaction to this project based on what we saw in social media from readers was, “Whoa. I never imagined that this number was this big.”

We can only envision how big the number is when we put it at a human scale, and we help people compare themselves to the rest of the data. So, besides showing data, we should always try to strive, particularly in stories like these, to try to help people. There’s a lot of discussion of everybody providing empathy through visualization. I’m super skeptical about that. I don’t think that visualization really creates empathy, but what we can do is to provide other means, other ways to see the data that may help you make a connection between the data and the people who are being represented in that data, which can help you understand the scope of the challenge and the scope of the problem. Thank you so much for having me.

Aneurin Bosley: Thank you very much, Alberto. Super interesting. We’re basically just going in alphabetical order by last name. And so, I’m going to hand the virtual controls over to Joel Eastwood.

Joel Eastwood: Hello. How are you doing. Thank you so much for having me. It’s a real pleasure to be here and a real privilege in part because Carleton is very near and dear to my heart. I attended my undergraduate at Carleton’s journalism school, where I graduated in 2013 and have a lot of both fond memories and a lot of thanks for getting me to where I am today. I’m currently the graphics editor for *The Wall Street Journal’s* investigations team.

And in that role, I have been covering COVID pretty much since the pandemic began or at least since we became covering it as a major news story in March. I’ve done a number of stories collaborating with journalists and reporters. We’ve done everything from investigations into how cruise lines knowingly spread the virus around the globe to looking at how New York State handled it. We’ve looked at some of the hardest hit nursing homes in the country, in New Jersey and in Washington.

It’s been a difficult story to cover obviously, and I’d like to talk about some of the particular difficulties and what we can learn from them. But first I’d like to take a little tangent and talk about my spring vacation, and I’m realizing that I’m doing what Alberto just described, which is trying to find a way to humanize a big dataset. Also I’ve been in the house for a very long time, so it’s nice to show vacation photos to a captive audience.

On February 27th, I decided to go on a little trip. I started in New York, which is where I’m currently based. I attended a wedding in Atlanta, and then I met with some family in San Diego. I went to Disneyland. First time going to Disneyland in California. It was fantastic and finished up at a conference in New Orleans where actually I saw Alberto talk. So it’s great to hear him again.

At the time, in my defence, this is the chart that I was looking at. I was debating, we knew COVID was a major news story, and the case counts that we were looking at by the end of February, the United States had yet to have more than three cases a day, there had been very few days with back-to-back confirmed cases. It appeared to be an isolated event.

We now know based on computational research, based on epidemiological research, based on computer models, that in fact, by the time I left on that trip, there had already been active, sustained community transmission between Americans, not just in one or two places, but very likely around the country. And in fact, on the day I left on my trip, I believe that in at least 37 states we now estimate that there was a better than even chance that there was sustained transmission on the ground. And I was unwittingly and unknowingly flying into hotspots where COVID was not an isolated event, kept in a couple of hospitals, but was actively transmitting throughout the community, probably at Disneyland.

So, there are two questions that I'm going to try to answer. The first is to shed a little bit of light on why that early data was so inaccurate. Why it missed the mark so broadly. And the second will be to try to distill some lessons about what we as data journalists, what I've personally been reflecting upon and what I think data journalists more broadly can hopefully learn from this. So the first part of that question, why was the data incomplete?

There's four main points here. The first, is simply a lack of testing. This is US specific, but the number of symptomatic COVID-19 infections were being picked up by tests, we now estimate was a fraction of the actual number of cases. And it's also important to note that symptomatic COVID-19 infections are themselves only a subset of the larger pool of people who have COVID-19. And this wasn't just isolated to the United States. Unfortunately, I don't have Canada in this chart, but it is broadly true of developed nations with the exception of a few outliers like South Korea, where testing was happening far more broadly

In those early days in February and March, most nations were only picking up a very small fraction of the symptomatic cases that actually existed among their populations. Second point, when tests were taking place, those tests were inadequate in part because they were mostly only testing individuals who were hospitalized. And that means you're only testing people whose infection has progressed to such an extreme point that they end up in the hospital.

That also means that the numbers you're looking at are lagging indicators because COVID takes two to 14 days to incubate, to manifest. If you're only testing people when they show up in the hospital, you're guaranteed to be days or weeks behind the curve. Again, many of those tests were not accurate. And this remains, I think, a bit of an open question, but certainly at the time in February and March, when tests were being administered, there were false negative results. Some experts put those false negatives as high as one in three.

And then number four, even once you've cleared all of those prior hurdles and the tests actually do take place, the numbers simply were not being reported in any consistent or reliable way. My chart here is just looking at California, but this is again, broadly true of most states where it took time for the states to begin aggregating this data, to begin coordinating between both public and private labs that were doing the testing. Initially, it didn't report pending tests, and even months into the pandemic, there were still on-going issues with backlogs of tests, tests not being reported correctly. And to the best of my knowledge, there's still no centralized official dataset that's trying to capture all of this.

Hopefully that is a bit of a lightning round of all of the issues, which we've unpacked over the last few months. Here's the harder question, which is what can we, as data journalists learn from this? I'm not an epidemiologist, I'm not a scientist. I can't really speak to some of the specifics of how tests could have been administered differently or better, but hopefully I can speak to a little bit of how, as a data journalist, I should think about this scenario moving forward.

This is my cat. His name is Perry. There's a quote that I'm fond of, which is, "The best model of a cat is another cat." And that's a quote by a mathematician and a physicist who wrote in 1945 that, "No substantial part of the universe is so simple that it can be grasped in controlled fed abstraction." In other words, the only way for any of us as humans to understand what's going on around us, is to apply a layer of abstraction, to create some sort of model.

Ideally, in a perfect world, that model would be something that would be so complex that it would cover the entire universe and would have essentially a one-to-one correspond with it. And anyone capable of elaborating and comprehending such a model in its entirety would find the model wholly unnecessary, which is to say, if you want to understand my cat, I could give you charts on my cat and I can give you pictures of my cat, but ultimately the only way you can truly understand what my cat is, is to hold him in your arms.

And to translate this into data schemes, any data collection, and by extension visualize each abstraction into a model reality. It's an attempt to abstract and distill reality into some higher-level model. And the process of abstraction distillation of that underlying reality is necessary because reality is complex. And if you want to understand a complex system such as the economy or the political system or a pandemic, we have to use data. That is one of our key tools to clarifying and simplifying.

Our role as data journalists is to ensure that in that clarification and simplification, it does not become simplistic. And the dataset does not become too far removed from the underlying reality that it purports to represent. And this isn't just COVID. I think the economy is another classic example where the high-level number that we're looking at, say the stock market index, is several layers of distraction removed from on the ground economic activity.

People buying or selling things is aggregated into a corporate balance sheet, which is aggregated into a corporate stock price, which is an aggregate into a stock market index. There are layers upon layers of abstraction. And our role as data journalists is to try to understand those layers of abstraction and understand what is being lost in translation as we proceed up that tree. And I'm paraphrasing Dave Tait here, who famously told me in one of my Carleton undergraduate classes that, "The role of journalists is to simplify without things becoming simplistic."

So, my final takeaways, if there are any data journalists listening, is to always be asking yourself this, not just with COVID data, with any kind of dataset, what is the gap? Because there is one, what is the gap between this dataset and the reality it purports to represent. And a good starting place is to just ask yourself these questions of who's included in this dataset, who's being ignored, what is being

overlooked? And finally, realizing that sometimes if that gap is big enough, if the exclusions are so egregious, that, in of itself, can be a story, as we've found out with this COVID data. Thank you so much.

Aneurin Bosley: Okay. Thank you very much, Joel. Super interesting. Now I'm going to hand the virtual desktop over to you Nael.

Nael Shiab: All right. So first, I'm just going to present myself a little bit. I work for the French services of the Canadian Broadcasting Company. As you know, Canada is a bilingual country. We have the English services that we often call CBC and we have CBC/Radio Canada, the French services. I work for the French services, but I often publish in English too, even if I work in French every day. Also, I'm a data reporter who codes. So the big difference between my work and traditional reporters is the fact that I code in Python, I code in Node, in JavaScript. I'm able to analyze a lot of data and to visualize it or create interactive projects.

And I'm going to show you some of my work before the pandemic and during the pandemic because it's not over. And the main idea of my presentation is the fact that before I was working with static data, and I was trying to have the biggest impact in the shortest amount of time, every time I published. But with the pandemic this changed, I realized that I needed to work with ever-changing data and I needed to publish projects that were built to last a very long time.

Before the pandemic, one project that I did with one of my colleagues, Valerie Ouellet, was an investigation about Airbnb. Basically, I went on the server of Airbnb, and I collected all of the listings in 16 Canadian cities, including Montreal. And this is a great example of my work before the pandemic. I realized that actually a lot of Airbnb listings were outside of the blue zone in downtown Montreal. And the blue zone is where Airbnb listings downtown Montreal are allowed. And outside, all of the red dots is where it's completely forbidden. So, this is the kind of investigation that I was doing before the pandemic.

Basically, it's static data. I got the data, I do my analysis. I publish my story, big impact. We changed the regulation in Montreal for Airbnb listings. And I go to the next story. The other kind of work that I did before the pandemic was to try to explore the visualization in different ways to inform the public and to make some information interesting for them. For example, I decided to do a better visualization in 3D of Quebec's budget.

Basically, the idea was that a construction block would represent \$5 million, and all the data visualization is in 3D. It works well on your mobile phone. It's just a way to show you how the Quebec government is spending your money, taxpayers' money. It's something also that I tried to do before the pandemic, and I'm still trying to do it, to make sometimes boring information more engaging for the readers, but it's still static data, and I am still trying to have the biggest impact when I publish in the shortest amount of time.

Then the pandemic arrived. So mid-March we realized in Quebec and basically in Canada, that this was going to be a huge story for a very long time. The first thing I did, as did many other reporters, was to create a spreadsheet. And we realized that we needed to collect that data for four different types of regions. Other regions

in Quebec, all the Canadian provinces, all the states in the United States and all countries in the world.

But how is it possible for a small team, because we're just two reporters in my team, to abate this data that is always changing? Well, I created a little chart just to help me work things through. I realized that, okay, there's two sources in Quebec to get the data I wanted. Then there's the federal data in Canada, but there's also all of the provincial websites in Canada that I needed to check all the time because we live in a federation and health-care services are a provincial jurisdiction. So each province is doing stuff differently.

And I wasn't able to gather all of these data 24 hours a day, seven days a week, all the time. I realized that I needed to do web scrapers for each province in Canada. For example, for Ontario basically it's a computer program that I code with instruction for the computer or the server. And the computer will do that all the time. As many times as I asked it to do it.

For example, I go on the website for the Ontario data. I get the cases, the deaths, recovered, hospitalization, all kinds of stuff. I do several tests on the data, and if it is good, it goes into our spreadsheet that gathers all of our data. Then it is sent to database and an API, and in the end, it goes to our dashboard. There's a French version and an English version.

So, just collecting the data was already very complicated and all of that had to be very robust to work all the time. And checking provincial websites every two minutes to be sure that it's almost real time on our dashboard when the news breaks every day, how many cases there are in Ontario and Quebec, Alberta, but then we also had to code the dashboard. And that was very complicated because at first it wasn't very clear for us what was the data, and how to correctly inform the people.

We created the dashboard. We made a lot of changes. There are still many changes that we need to do on this. It's ever-changing data, and it's messy. And our methodological notes are just so big and that keeps getting bigger all the time. But this is the most-read project ever in the history of Radio Canada. And each week it's the number one content since March. We've never seen anything like that. It's the first time that we have content that lives so long, and it's really changed the way I'm doing journalism now.

I realized also that once you have all of these data and the API behind it, you're able to do many other kinds of projects. The dashboard is actually the charts that I decided to create, but perhaps the users want to have other kinds of charts. So, I created another project where they can choose the variables, the areas, they can change the charts and download the data as they wish. They can create favourites. And they can save their preferences. It's really changed the way I'm working now and the way my team is working now.

The news cycle is very short, but at the same time, I think reporters are able to build things that can last a very long time. And I think I forgot that before the pandemic, and now I want to do more projects to be able to inform people on a very long timescale.

Aneurin Bosley: Thank you very much. Now, that is very, very interesting and I wonder how many other data journalists in Canada and the United States and elsewhere are having that same experience of suddenly having to grapple with a dataset that's constantly changing and being updated. That's a whole new host of challenges, so thank you. I am going to pass the virtual desktop over to Patti.

Patti Sonntag: Hi everybody. I went in a slightly different way from everybody else. The Institute for Investigative Journalism (IJJ) is devoted to serving people in areas in particular where a lot of data isn't gathered. We are a national investigative and data co-op. We gather hard-to-find data working with journalists at all news organizations across the country, including community radio, and our backbone is a network of educational institutions and journalism students who are all becoming data journalists as part of our work together.

We're looking right now at the drive to Fernie, BC, which is where I'm from, a very small town that is the inspiration for some of this work. Canada faces this problem on a scale that our audiences on this panel in the United States do not. This is a very similar scale, and Canada's population density makes simply just having enough boots on the ground, very, very difficult for us here.

The Institute for Investigative Journalism has been gathering huge groups of students. We've actually engaged in world record-breaking professional and student collaborations and as you know Canadians are polite, so they're really good at collaboration. All that niceness, it really works out! And working with researchers, we have uncovered some incredible stories.

We have a story about people in Saskatchewan and Ontario who were being subjected to toxic gas leaks that were so bad that they were landing some people in intensive care. Documents showed that industry and government had discussed perhaps some changes to regulation to address the issue and then decided against it. Months later, a man was killed on the job.

In this case, well researchers from Harvard School of Public Health and Northeastern University flew out to Saskatchewan and measured gas leaks at rural farmhouses in Saskatchewan and found that the air in some places was unfit to sustain human life. This resulted in hundreds of articles and broadcasts and kicked off the Institute for Investigative Journalism. The students I had were a really valuable educational experience. That project included four universities and three news organizations.

Our next investigation involved nine or 10 universities and 10 news organizations nationwide. We gathered 79,000 municipal water samples through a freedom of information request. We actually tested the water at more than 400 homes. And we found that in a half a dozen cities, lead levels in tap water exceeded that of Flint, Michigan at the height of their crisis in older homes. So, one-third exceeded the national guideline. This was a very valuable project, lasted for a couple of years, and it's still ongoing.

When the pandemic began, the IJJ partnered with the Canadian Association of Journalists and Esri Canada (the ArcGIS [geographic information specialist]) to begin plotting and tracking the outbreaks across Canada. In particular, we were interested

in vulnerable populations that might not be reported on otherwise, people who might be homeless, rural populations, other places where data just isn't gathered.

To fill this data gap, we created an app so that any journalist, if they were so inclined, if they heard of an outbreak could enter a record of what they had heard. The app is limited to journalists — you had to be a working journalist to have access to the app, which was password protected. Now the staff working on this included all of these people here. Students across Canada at every university you can think of working in their communities, so they stayed in place. And the stories that they uncovered were incredible.

Here's one story about the difference between income levels and infection levels. It was probably no surprise that people who had higher income were simply less likely to face fatalities. This story I'm particularly proud of, a student from First Nations University, Jayda Bowden Hernie and her colleagues at Mount Royal University and MacEwan University in Edmonton, called every First Nation and Indigenous community in Saskatchewan and found a striking lack of personal protective equipment.

This resulted in publications in all of our partner media companies in the province. Including the *Regina Leader Post*, the *Prince Albert Herald*, Global News, and there are two dozen media organizations taking part. It was quite an accomplishment for an emerging journalist.

We have gathered more than 17,000 locations where outbreaks have been reported and tracked, what has happened at each location as best we can with the staff we've got. We have a database of more than 20,000 locations at this point. And several maps and databases tracking how this happens. And these are interactive maps.

We have lots of different maps for our journalist members that have been published on an ongoing basis. What we have seen is that we're more interested in the granular data. We're more interested in the specific people and locations and populations affected and trying to fill that data gap. This is a much bigger problem in Canada than the United States. It takes all of us, and the data co-op has been a very interesting way to approach that.

Aneurin Bosley:

Thank you very much, Patti. The reporting around gas and water quality and now more recently on COVID-19 has been very important work. And in an era where newsrooms are shrinking, unfortunately there are fewer and fewer people in those newsrooms who actually have the ability to do that sort of thing. And the Institute has played an incredibly important role there. Thank you very much.

What implications do you think that the experiences have been like so far? COVID-19 has of course presented some unique challenges, but as Alberto and others have pointed out, a lot of this is not new, but maybe it's more important now than it was in the past. I don't want to make any big sweeping statements here, but I'd like to find out what people think, how should journalism educators respond to all of this?

We've got keen, smart students, not all of them by their second or third year are experts in using Excel let alone T3 or other kinds of things. So, what should we be thinking about as we help students start to develop some of the skills and expertise where they're going to be better prepared to deal with this kind of thing?

Alberto Cairo:

Well, it's specifically about students who have a background in design or in journalism, help those students understand that visualization is not magic. That the tools that we have heard about today here are Python, and we have seen coding Python, and that's super scary or it looks so complicated. You can laugh, but it does complicate it. JavaScript and T3 looks super scary, but that comes later in your career. You can do good data journalism with Excel. Or with Google Sheets, if you prefer to use something simpler, you can do good journalism just with that.

And in terms of visualization, you can begin with free tools. There are tons of free tools today. You could begin with Datawrapper. You can begin with Flourish. You can begin with Tableau Public, Power BI. We have so many options now that it is almost a shame that we don't try to expose students to these types of work and help them lose their fear towards this visualization because it's really not magic.

In my own classes, for example, we have been forced to offer triple the sections that we used to just because there is a growing interest in learning visualization not only among journalists, but on data scientists, scientists of different kinds, statisticians, engineers, etc. More and more people are coming to our classes to learn how to communicate with data.

And I'm very upfront in my own classes saying, "You're getting into a journalism class. This is a journalism class. I hope that you're aware of that because you don't need a diploma in journalism to do journalism." And so that's how I usually begin my classes. So just talking specifically about journalists, losing the fear about visualization, and then very importantly, educating our students in thinking scientifically and thinking about numbers.

I'm 46, so I studied journalism more than 25 years ago. And something that I used to hear in school 25 years ago is something that I still hear today from our journalists. "I study journalism because I don't like math." Well, if you don't like math, you cannot be a journalist. I mean, if you don't know the difference between a mean and a medium and a mode, and when to use each one of those, you are not qualified to be a journalist. And I'm sorry to be so blunt about this, but that is the equivalent of not knowing grammar. If you don't know grammar, you cannot be a journalist. If you don't know those very basic things, you cannot be a journalist either.

And we should go a little bit beyond that. It's like losing the fear towards statistics. The problem with statistics and quantitative thinking in general, we can talk about statistics, that's just a small portion of what we could call rational thinking. The problem with statistics is the way that it's taught by the statisticians. I have many friends who are statisticians, and they are very aware of this problem. They usually teach statistics from the point of view of either pure mathematics or applied mathematics, or they teach you from the point of view of research, not from the point of view of how to think through these statistics or with the statistics.

That's the way that we should teach statistics, at least at the intro level — how to use statistics for reasoning and teach it with fun examples. Don't begin with unemployment rates, which are of course super important. But begin with topics that are a little bit more approachable, a little bit more fun. What I'm saying is more

directed towards educators. How we can make thinking about numbers a bit more approachable, a little bit less threatening.

Fortunately, there are many free resources and non-free resource books and tutorials, that can help anybody who fears statistics to learn at least the basics of statistics. I would encourage students to try to get into this world because it really gives you another completely different toolkit, skillset, which will be complimentary to what you already have, and will make you more employable in the future, not necessarily in journalism, but also in other areas.

Aneurin Bosley: Thank you very much. Joel, do you want to add anything to that?

Joel Eastwood: There's nothing I can really say that Alberto hasn't already said, but better. I would agree with what previous panellists have said in terms of some of the pieces that I work on that have been, I'm grateful to say, the most viewed pieces on *The Wall Street Journal* site. We published a piece a week or two ago that was, I believe, the second-highest viewed piece of the last two weeks. And the highest-viewed piece was another graphic, one about politics.

So there's an appetite for this sort of content. I think that appetite is only increasing as readers and as audience members become more technologically savvy and more data literate. We're seeing in real-time people who before wouldn't necessarily have been familiar with this sort of material, wanting more charts, learning how to read these charts, wanting more complex charts.

In terms of what educators can do, certainly when I was an undergraduate at Carleton, I was very fortunate to receive instruction in spreadsheets from instructors like Dave Mikai, but overall, data journalism was seen as a bit of a niche, and math and numeracy more generally was also seen as a niche, fairly restricted to business and financial reporters. And one of the things that I think the pandemic has laid bare is that every single section of the newspaper has been affected by COVID-19 and thus reporters in every single section have had to develop a fluency and a comfort talking about things like case counts.

It doesn't matter if you're covering sports or foreign affairs or the art section, you have to be fluent in the language of what these numbers mean and how these numbers relate and what a per capita infection rate means and what an RR Node is. Furthermore, the reason why I also think so much of this numeracy and fluency is important for journalists is because at the same time that we're seeing journalists evolving their language, we're also seeing policy makers increasingly deploying charts and statistics to the public, but they don't necessarily do so with the same interest that journalists do so.

By which, I mean, as Alberto can also certainly attest to, charts and data can be used as a slight of hand. The metric that you choose to report can be used to mitigate or downplay, or even if it's something like you're reporting the percentage of cases as a share of tests administered versus as a share of the total population, there's a lot of ways in which this savvy cuts both ways.

If we as journalists, even if we're not necessarily producing this content, I don't think you have to be a data journalist to place a great deal of value in knowing how

to be skeptical about numbers, how to think more critically about numbers and to recognize that you have to interrogate and think critically about a dataset in the same way that you would interrogate and think critically about what a human source is saying to you. Just because something takes the form of data or it takes the form of a chart does not mean that it is authoritative and all-knowing in some ground truth that doesn't deserve the same degree of journalism skepticism.

Aneurin Bosley: It might've just been thrust into your hand by Donald Trump. So, who knows? Nael, I don't know whether you have anything to add to that?

Nael Shiab: Well, I'm the one who talked about Python and JavaScript probably being scary.

Aneurin Bosley: Yes, I know you're being scary.

Nael Shiab: Sure. I scared everyone, but what Alberto said, it's true. I wasn't doing that when I started in data journalism, it took years to learn these kinds of tools. But something I think is really important to remember is the fact that COVID-19 didn't change journalism. It changed maybe the way we do journalism, but the basics of journalism are still the same. And with my students, something I see very often is the fact that they don't know where to start. It's hard. Where do you start? Should I get the data first? Should I get the story first?

But the way I work and the way I try to teach data journalism is to find a very important question for society and try to find the answer with numbers. Try to do a quantitative analysis to find the answer to this question. So maybe it's how many cases of COVID-19 are there in my neighbourhood? Maybe that's just the question and you will have to do a lot of work just to find this answer. But it also could be do women have as many chances to be elected as men during federal elections in Canada? This was a story that we did last year with my colleague Valerie.

A good way to start is to find a very important question for you, and then you will need to learn the way to find the answer to this question. You will have the motivation to find the answer and to learn new techniques and to perhaps learn programming languages and to learn how to use Google spreadsheets or Tableau. But start with a question because you are reporters and your job is to find answers.

Aneurin Bosley: Thank you. Patti, do you want to weigh in on that one?

Patti Sonntag: I find the division that is remaining in a newsroom about who is a data journalist and who is not to be really outdated thinking, all of us are data journalists. In my classes, everybody does it, everybody's working with the spreadsheets. We don't talk about math. We talk about the three buttons and which ones to push, and gradually some people might get interested in the mechanics behind it. Some don't, but at least everybody knows which buttons to push. If there are any students or any mid-career generalists listening, it's really not that hard. This is super easy. And it changes your journalism practice.

Aneurin Bosley: Thank you. Great way to round up that one. I've got a question from Rachel. So reporting is generally quick turnaround work. However, data in the case of COVID-19 is not visible immediately. How does data collection and visualization slow down the process of reporting and how do journalists tackle this?

Joel Eastwood: At *The Wall Street Journal*, we are fortunate to have a very large team, both graphics and a very large newsroom that's spread out across the entire world, which is a real luxury that I recognize most newsrooms do not have. And I've certainly worked in newsrooms where I'm one of two or three people. I mean, the answer when you're working at that scale is essentially that we have individuals or even teams of people dedicated to just doing the sort of data aggregation and collection that is necessary, and then constantly updating that data and making it available to reporters so that they can always be grabbing the latest stuff.

There's also a layer of building graphics or building infrastructure that can be sustained or be constantly updated. So, you only have to build it once and then you can keep it live, keep it evergreen. I think most newsrooms go through this, these conversations, which is trying to assess the scope of a news story when it's first developing and trying to get a handle on whether this is a story that will be large enough that it's worth investing the time and energy into building out the infrastructure of something that we can update constantly.

And then I think the last part of that is recognizing that, especially when you're doing this sort of work on deadlines, that there are very real trade-offs that working journalists are forced to make when asking themselves what is the minimum viable product I need to create? It's an iterative process too. Recognizing that maybe I can collect the very basic top-line numbers that I need in order to put out a first bulletin, but then that will be something I can build on and build toward with a story that has legs and that we're going to keep going back to.

Aneurin Bosley: Thanks Joel, and thanks for that question.

Alberto Cairo: I have a general thought about visualization slowing things down or accelerating things. It depends a lot on the story, but the purpose of this visualization is not just communication with others. Sometimes it's communication with yourself. Many times you will not be able to understand what hides behind a dataset if you don't visualize it first, you will not detect patterns and trends in the data that may be worth pursuing as a possible story in the data. There is a whole branch of statistics called exploratory data analysis, and a great part of it is the use of visualization to extract meaning from data. So sometimes visualization will not slow you down. It will accelerate the process. It will make you smarter in some sense.

Joel Eastwood: Yes. The other supplementary to that is that you can also approach datasets to find stories to get scoops and to get exclusives. And you're only working against the deadline and a news cycle if you're trying to get something that everyone else has. If you can find a dataset or find a new approach to a dataset to come up with something that no one else has, you set your own deadline.

Aneurin Bosley: Thank you very much. I have another question here from Matthew. When looking to gather and analyze data during a pandemic, which sources are able to provide the most accurate data.

Patti Sonntag: That is a very interesting question. We did an analysis and found that the provincial data was mostly wrong. The most accurate data in Canada was from the regional offices, which tended to provide more exact numbers. And then the province would gradually catch up. But if there was ever a choice between a provincial versus a

regional figure, it is much safer going with the regional. What was quite interesting to us was that journalists were more often right than the region was.

If you look back through the project pandemic records, you'll see this repeated pattern where journalists provided a high number. The regional office or government would say, "No, that can't be right." And then gradually, like a week later, it would turn out that it was in fact correct. So when we had a choice between a journalist number or a regional number, we learned to choose the journalist.

Aneurin Bosley: Interesting. I don't know if either Joel or Alberto can speak to what the situation is in the United States as far as accurate sources of data.

Joel Eastwood: Our two main go-tos are the Johns Hopkins data, which is being collected by Johns Hopkins University. And then the COVID tracking project, which is an independent initiative to try to aggregate all the testing data that the various states are providing. Both datasets don't always agree with each other, and they both have their own issues, which in part is because of the battery of reasons that I ran through. That every state has their own criteria for how tests are run, how tests are reported and then that's true internationally as well.

I don't think there's a single catch-all answer for which one is the platonic ideal. Then I think this goes to the heart, that there is no platonic ideal. Ultimately, there's no sort of all-encompassing ground truth of the COVID-19 pandemic. There's nothing but a series of trade-offs over what you're measuring and what you're excluding.

So, I would almost challenge the frame of the question, which is you can't hope to ever find that mystical magic, wellspring of data; all you can do is be transparent about what the trade-offs are and be transparent to your readers over what is being measured.

Nael Shiab: I think being transparent is important, but also to be open to the suggestions of your readers. With the dashboard that we created, it was very important to me to put contact info right at the top. And we knew that we were going to have thousands and thousands of emails. In some cases, they weren't very nice to read, but in other cases it was very interesting information about things that we didn't know about our own data. For example, a retired statistician and I exchanged many emails because he was doing some research on his own time, and he was pointing me to great resources. So transparency is important, but there's also the fact that readers could help when there's something happening on this scale.

Aneurin Bosley: Thank you. Alberto. Perhaps I can just ask you a follow-up question related to what's been said. There's a lot of uncertainty around the data. Some of it is not up to date. Some of it's just plain wrong. How do you approach the idea of conveying that uncertainty? I think when people see a graphic and visualize data, they perceive a certainty there that might not be there. And I'm just wondering how you think about conveying some level of uncertainty or a tentativeness about what the data is showing?

Alberto Cairo: If I answer that question, I will spoil the content of the next 10 books that I'm planning to write because that's one of the biggest challenges right now. It's always been a challenge in how to communicate. I wouldn't say the challenge is not to

communicate uncertainty. The challenge is how to communicate the uncertainty at the same time that you communicate confidence; how confident are you that the data that you're conveying actually has some truth behind it? How would you balance it out? When you are only focused on uncertainty, the reaction of many is to say, "Well, scientists know nothing." It's like it's so uncertain, it's all over the place. And it's not that.

That's why it's so important to try to increase the level of statistical sophistication of our readers, explaining statistical concepts. Those of us who are a little bit older, perhaps, how many times did we see in a news story, a journalist explain what confidence is? Never, until probably five or six years ago or 10 years ago, when we started seeing forecast models and more sophisticated statistical concepts in the media, when journalists decided to start explaining those concepts to people or related to the statistical distribution or related to forecast or related confidence and uncertainty and so on.

But we need to explain what we need to show. We could begin with the simplest types of things like surveys and polls. Journalists love to report and use polls. And if candidate A is going to get 48 percent of the vote and candidate B is going to get 46 percent, we love to say that candidate A is ahead of candidate B, when that's probably absolutely not true because the confidence interval around those point estimates is probably super wide. Probably they are tied. All that we can say is that they are tied.

But besides saying that they are tied, we can draw the margin of error around the point estimates, and then add an explanation for people, "Well, this is what a confidence interval is or this is what a margin of error means." And this is how we can say, we are pretty confident that this is the truth, but actually the actual value could vary or fluctuate inside these brackets. It's a little bit more complicated than that, but we could try to use metaphors and analogies to explain all these concepts.

Now we can do it visually, and there are many people doing a lot of work in all these areas.

Putting yourself in front of the graphic and actually explaining to people what it is that the graphic is showing, but also what the graphic is not showing. That's also quite important to try to dispel possible misinterpretations of that graphic as well. That could also be a limitation of the graphic. So again, that's a short answer to a short question, but I could go on for hours and hours and hours.

Aneurin Bosley: Well, we look forward to the next 10 books.

We have another question from Sarah. She asks, "How do you bring the me layer of data to a static medium like a physical paper or a sole visualization or a dataset that has less direct me layer. Would it be through small multiples so that each person can find themselves in the data or a less traditional graphic that try to make colder graphs warmer".

Joel Eastwood: I think there's the method Alberto was talking about earlier, which is providing some layer of interactivity to let a reader find themselves in the dataset. But as the question asks, how do you do that when it's the static visualization or when it's not

possible? In traditional written journalism, we have the concept of an anecdotal lead. In good feature reporting where you're trying to tell a broad story, you want to humanize it, you want to give the reader someone they can empathize with, and you want to have good quotes and anecdotes and good colour. We'd call it a story.

I think all of those same methods can apply to a graphic or to a dataset where you can annotate a specific data point and tell the story of that single dot. For example, one of the pieces I covered was looking at a particularly devastating COVID outbreak at a nursing home in New Jersey. And the aggregate data we were showing was the hundreds of patients who lived in this nursing home and how many of them died in aggregate, where they died, the timeline of how they became infected.

And the way I tried to humanize that data was by attaching a name to just one of those dots and having annotations that said, this is Rose Dante. She was an 80-something-year old, a widow. Here's when she first got sick, here's a quote from her daughter providing the exact same approach you would use to writing an anecdotal feature within your story, but applying that to the data so that from the standpoint of the reader, you understand that these aren't just individual dots on a piece of paper, each dot represents a person, a human life and try to make that human connection.

Nael Shiab:

It's a great question, and actually it's something that I love doing because for us, data is interesting. We're comfortable with numbers, but not everyone is. So I think we have a role to take people by the hand and try to find a way to bring them to the number that is maybe more interesting and less cold. And I can give you a few examples very quickly. In 2018, we had the provincial election and we have something called the electoral compass in Canada that maybe you have done.

Basically, it's socio-demographic data and opinions about should the government raise the taxes or not. And each nut is a person and we can switch the person in categories such as age, but something that I really wanted to do, was for people to be able to put them into the chart so they can answer a few questions that will be useful for the chart.

So, then it adds a dot that is actually you. And you can see if your opinion or the way you answer the questions is the same as another citizen in Quebec. That's an easy way to add you in the chart. Something we did during the last election was also to create a "build your own voter" and it will tell you the chances that this person would vote for the different political parties.

Again, everybody was trying to do themselves and then their partner and then their children, and then their friends. It was a way to add warmth to this data. We also tried to do some experimentation with chat bots. I won't go into details because everybody knows what that is now. And the last experiment that we did was to put myself into the data. We did a story about the economic impact of COVID-19 in Canada. And the idea was to create a 3D environment that would be less cold than just talking about the employment rate.

So, we decided to put the data into a 3D chart and to have buildings and all kinds of stuff, and you can move all the data and meet experts that are talking about it. All of that could have been just a regular story, but it was just a little bit more warmth and the idea that we're talking to you specifically. It's more of a designer and artistic way

of thinking about journalism, a more creative way of talking about journalism. You still have to be exact on your facts or bring some uncertainty, but at the same time, you can be fun and engaging.

Aneurin Bosley: Thanks for that question. I'll ask the second part of Matthew's question. Patti, this seems directly related to the projects that you've been working on. "When gathering research data, what are some of the most important factors to keep in mind?"

Patti Sonntag: If you're going to go about gathering data, you're going to have to decide on what your method is. The first thing to do is read about other people who have collected data and the methods that they use, and you might need to brew yourself a pot of coffee and read a series of scientific papers, including the fine print. And once you have read those scientific papers, I have a method, which is one full weekend, just myself and a timer. I can read for 50 minutes. I get 10 minutes to watch as much *Star Trek* as I want, and then back to the timer. And after one full weekend, I'm in a good spot to do an investigation.

Once you're familiar enough with the papers, then you write your email to the experts that you have chosen. And you say, "Dear Mr. Expert, I loved your paper about, Oh, I don't know, the parasites on the bud worms. I particularly loved the creativity of the method you described in section X, which clearly is much better than your colleagues." And if you have that level of knowledge then an expert will be willing to talk with you and take you seriously. If you go in and say, "Hey, I would like to talk about COVID." You probably are not going to get much.

Once you've had your discussion about how you're planning to go about your project with your researcher, based on your close study of what's happening you can then proceed with fairly decent confidence, keeping in mind that everything that can possibly go wrong is about to go wrong. And you're going to have to think on your feet. So, as long as you're not scared of a few challenges, easy.

Aneurin Bosley: Easy, piece of cake.

Thank you for that. Joel or Nael, did you want to add anything to that question?

Joel Eastwood: The only thing I'd add is that collecting our own data is a labourious and time-consuming process that we rarely embark upon, in part, because of how difficult it is, and I have nothing but respect for people who take that upon themselves. And if you're going to do so, I would really recommend you get acquainted with a good piece of database software or are very fluent in spreadsheets because bookkeeping and making sure you have a clearly defined data dictionary is paramount if you're going to go down that road.

Aneurin Bosley: I think we'll wrap this up. I want to say, thank you very much, Patti, Nael, Joel. I think the message here is, don't be afraid to just get started. It is not rocket science. It takes a little bit of work and some curiosity. I think that's a good message to end on.



JOURNALISM IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

ALTERNATIVE NEWS MODELS AND THE PANDEMIC

PANEL

Moderator: Colette Watson, CPAC

Speakers: Jesse Brown, *Canadaland*; Linda Solomon Wood, *National Observer*;
Alan Soon, *Splice Media*; Janine Warner, *Sembra Media*

Colette Watson:

Welcome everyone to this session. I hope you've had a great and informative conference so far. Our session is alternative media in the pandemic and crisis, and we have an amazing lineup of panellists today. My name is Colette Watson, I'm president and general manager of the Cable Public Affairs Channel in Canada. I'm hoping that today's discussion, for the next 90 minutes, allows us to get more insight into alternative media and these brilliant people who developed, founded, funded and created their products can share a few nuggets with us, and then hopefully we can have a conversation afterwards. I am very much looking forward to hearing from you when that time comes. One of our panellists lives in Singapore. So he is not with us live. I had the pleasure of chatting with him two nights ago and we recorded that conversation.

Without further ado, I will jump into the introductions and then let you hear from our first panellist. Alan Soon, who is our first panellist is the co-founder of Splice Media, an organization that reports on and advocates for the transformation of media in Asia. Alan has worked in radio, television, newswires magazine, and online across Asia. He started his career as a reporter and grew into other operational roles at Bloomberg, CNBC, Kyodo News, StarTV and Channel News Asia. Prior to creating Splice Media, he led one of the largest digital newsrooms in the industry as Yahoo's managing editor for India and Southeast Asia. Without further ado, here's my conversation with Alan from two nights ago.

Alan, tell us what drove you to start Splice Media?

Alan Soon:

What a great question to start with. That was five years ago. I had at that point done about two decades in journalism. I started out as a radio reporter and moved over to TV. I did a bit of newswires as well, magazines, but mostly in broadcast. My space was always around what was going on in broadcast, was always a big operation, it was always a big newsroom. I worked at Bloomberg, at CNBC, for example, and then later on went to run Yahoo's media operations here in Southeast Asia and India, which at that time, was the largest digital operation of any company in this region. That was six good years at Yahoo where I built up local teams all across the region, trained them, gave them proper workflow tools and whatnot.

That was probably the best, most exciting thing I've ever done in my career. Just because it was that bridge that I was looking for to get moving, as a transition from legacy media to digital. Working with partners at that time, they told me what that gap was in terms of where a lot of these media companies were going in terms of figuring out their own process to transform mindsets within their own organizations, let alone workflows. How do you get a team that is steeped in traditional methods of storytelling into a digital mindset?

That's why I started Splice five years ago, because I felt like that gap was huge. For me, spending my first year at Yahoo, trying to understand how to translate some of these things. Some things just don't translate because it's digital. It's not meant to translate. Over time, I got a whole bunch of ideas around how to do this stuff better, how to think about this, and it's been a long journey. From the time that I had started at Yahoo, let's assume that was the start of my own personal transformation to where I am today, that's been a decade in itself. That's been quite an interesting one.

- Colette Watson:** I can imagine now you have started building the bridge between traditional and disruptor, now you're agitating and funding and creating and embracing disruption. Pre-pandemic times, disruption was because it was time or disruption was disruption. Has the pandemic changed how you view disruption? Is it another disruptor? Is it going to advance or accelerate change?
- Alan Soon:** I think the pandemic is an amplifier. I think what was taking about five years to happen has all happened within a year. So that's been tremendous, the one view that we have is that this is the golden age of media. We actually do believe that for once in our lifetime, in our generation, we now have the ability to create content cheaply on the phone and to be able to reach very niche, very specific audiences that want to see that kind of content. We're now able to not just create at a very low cost, the barrier to entry is very low. But the ability for us to go out there and make sure this content is reaching the right people, that is something that we've never had before, which I think is remarkable.
- That trend has been evolving for the past 10 years. This media transformation journey has taken a decade so far. What the pandemic has done is to accelerate all of that. If anything, it showed us that there were ways to work more effectively, ways to reduce costs in the way we're working, new ways to gather information and to talk to new people. If as reporters, our job is to source as widely as possible, then this is one of the best ways to do it.
- This is also one of the best ways in which we can reach new audiences by creating content, like we are right now making that available to more people. In many ways, that was always the journey of media transformation. But what we've seen is that in the past few months alone, people have gotten so accustomed with setting up a Zoom call, getting on a Zoom call, recording it, and then figuring out how to put it out there either on YouTube or on Facebook or all of these other places. These were things that we were not even thinking about a year ago, and here we are now, and we're super comfortable with that.
- Colette Watson:** Audiences have trained us to be more adaptable. Have you noticed a change or is monetization still a challenge or is it challenging?
- Alan Soon:** Monetization is a challenge. By monetization, I'm assuming here that we're talking about advertising just because that's always been the primary predominant revenue stream. I think any company that has built its entire business on advertising is struggling this year, and that's pretty obvious. But once again, this is an opportunity to pivot. It's an opportunity to force newsrooms to rethink how that works. If your entire strategy is around making sure that more and more people see an ad, then that is going to be increasingly difficult going forward, just because the cost of reaching those audiences will go up over time, and it always has. The cost of audience acquisition is something that newsrooms don't think enough about, and advertisers know this. They see this happening across the board, and that's why they are more focused than ever on reaching very niche audiences, which is something that media companies are often quite reluctant to try.
- Colette Watson:** Are you noticing any emerging trends out of all of this disruption in some of your start-ups?

Alan Soon: Yes. I think what's been really impressive this year is this acceleration to digital. Everyone that I know has tried some kind of a virtual event. I know we have at Splice as well. This was a lesson that we had to learn very quickly. I'm sure that this is something that a lot of media companies have been thinking as well. We no longer think of events as being events and that it's something you put together necessarily. It's something that we've started to internalize now as a content format specifically. A story could be told as an article, it can be told as a video, it can be told as a video session, like the one we're recording right now. We're seeing this as an emerging format that's easily accessible.

As I said, people know how to get on a Zoom call. They know how to download the Zoom app. All of that, difficult as it has been because of all different levels of friction of trying to figure out this stuff, I think a lot of people are very comfortable with this now, and this is now going to be a format going forward. If you're going to do a story about an environmental issue, for example, in a small town, why not just record it on Zoom now, and make that available as a full recording.

Colette Watson: Right. I spent some time running traditional linear media newsrooms, and you'd send a crew or three to interview the city manager. You'd sit in traffic. By the time you get your camera guy, or your sound editor and the reporter out in the car through the traffic, park the car, get to the city manager's office, get some B roll interview for 20 minutes, race back to the station and 45 seconds gets on the air that took four hours. Not anymore.

Alan Soon: I remember that early in my career as well. You know, going out with a truck.

Colette Watson: Millions of dollars of capital and inefficient labour. Only in the last year did newsrooms start, at least the ones where I was, hiring video journalists and giving them a phone, not a camera. Go forth, go tell stories. Go find the stories, no more rip and read. I think we will all benefit from that with respect to getting stories told and uncovered. So, do you have any darlings or, great little nuggets of start-ups you're seeing that are going to be the next big thing? I'm sure you think they're all going to be that or equal.

Alan Soon: I would like to think that they all are. We did a media festival last month called Splice beta, and we brought on a whole bunch of new newsrooms that I had no idea existed. I was just so happy to see, just as a way to learn from what they were trying to do. Since we're talking about video here, there was a very interesting newsroom called *The Current* in Pakistan, set up by Marium Chaudhry and several of her colleagues. She basically left traditional TV because she felt that medium was no longer effective when it came to reaching a younger audience. So she started at *The Current*, just to focus on that very specific segment, trying to take stories and make that useful and relevant in the lives of younger people.

That basically means you're shooting stories based on where you believe the distribution will go. You start with a Facebook live endpoint, then what kind of stories would work well in that. If you start with a YouTube endpoint, then how do you shoot that in a format that's appropriate for that audience?

I thought that was really interesting. I think there's a lot that needs to be done in that space, just because, how many people will go home to watch the 7:00 p.m.

news that I used to write. Those days are long gone, so that was quite interesting to see. In India, we saw an organization called Josh Talks. This is interesting, they don't think of themselves as a media company, but they believe that what they're doing is media related and that it's creating content that younger people in non-English speaking segments of society are reading and watching and learning from. Their goal is to create inspiring content that helps younger people seek out better education opportunities, better job opportunities, helping them figure out what is this process of building a career. That's interesting as well.

Colette Watson: Sounds inspirational actually.

Alan Soon: Oh, absolutely inspirational. That session left us all kind of choked up just because these were two young founders who are in their early twenties. The interesting thing is that very often the people that are most inspiring in this space, have not come from media at all. They are not journalists. They did not go to J-school. So their view of all of this is really quite interesting, in that content is secondary. Journalists always think that the content is first and foremost. People who don't begin in newsrooms tend to believe that it's more important to build a strong mission, and content is just one component in your arsenal.

Colette Watson: Wow. That is an interesting perspective, actually. I'd love to hear more about them. Maybe I'm hoping as part of the exchange, you could send us links to some of your favourites that you have either been inspired or impressed by, so that those who are watching, listening, participating in this conference can maybe go research. We only have a couple minutes left, but I wanted to ask you a few more things. I'll combine the two, and then I'll let you figure out how you want to reply. We're speaking to young journalists, what's your advice to them? What's your elevator pitch with respect to that? The other question is, are you still inspired, excited by the medium, by journalism?

Alan Soon: Such a great question. I'm going to get into so much trouble for this one. It wouldn't be the first time. I've got young kids, and like all parents, I think about what their careers would be like. I always ask myself, would I send them to J-school? Short answer is no. Given the way J-schools are organized these days. I believe in the ethics and the values of journalism. I do not believe in the way it's being conducted right now as a business. So in my mind, I often separate the two.

One interesting thing that I was thinking about yesterday, and actually it's something that I've talked about a number of times, is this rise of this influencer class of storytellers, people of influence and credibility in the eyes of their audiences. Very often, we, in traditional journalism with a capital J tend to ignore them because they're not like us. They didn't go to J-schools and they didn't work their way up a newsroom. Often we forget that people like them have such a great following and such a great influence on the communities that they serve. We don't want to call them journalists because we don't feel like they practice what we have. As if we have a code that's classified or something.

I think a lot about how we, in the traditional, capital J journalism, what are these values that we hold? How do we make sure that we're imparting the right ones? So that influences, YouTubers, TikTokers, Instagrammers can take some of these strong

values that we have and use them in the way that they work. I think that's a very important space to be in, if we're going to be relevant in the future. I think that if we're trying to teach people how to survive in a newsroom, where you start out as a news assistant, you move up to assistant producer and then producer, and then all that, that's not going to happen.

Colette Watson: It takes way too long.

Alan Soon: It takes way too long. Also, I think more importantly, there are fewer jobs in those spaces now. So, what are we preparing younger people for? I struggle with that.

Collette Watson: Is there a fine line between opinion and fact? Is there a danger there that we lose sight of? Is balance still relevant? Is there a difference between just listening to a bunch of opinions and does having an opinion make it real, or a fact? That's what I worry about in this. It seems a little bit difficult right now.

Alan Soon: I agree. The funny thing is that we now have a generation of people who've never thought about the distinction between those two. I care a lot about expressing facts in a fair manner. I think that these are important things that we need to impart, and we are probably not. The people who read us, watch us, listen to us, tend to be a very specific segment of society. The people who need to know the distinction between these different lenses, that's where we need to go. If we're not talking to influencers and YouTubers and Instagrammers about this stuff and telling them and showing them the differences, how do we expect them to ever do a better job in this?

Colette Watson: I totally agree, Alan, this has been fascinating. I could go on and on, but unfortunately, we've run out of time for our talk. I know that our audience would love to reach out and find out more about you. So, we'll put that information online.

Alan Soon: Thank you.

Colette Watson: I can't thank you enough for talking to us from across the world and participating in this.

Alan Soon: This has been great, thank you.

Colette Watson: I hope we can do this again. Okay. That was Alan. Next up is Linda Solomon Wood. I'm excited to hear from her. She is an award-winning investigative reporter who is now the founder and editor-in-chief of the *National Observer*. She previously founded the *Vancouver Observer* and has led both publications to win Canada's top awards for public service, investigative journalism, and excellence in reporting. Linda, welcome, and thank you so much for joining this panel.

Linda Solomon Wood: Thanks so much. Let me just name the elephant in the room from the start. I'm staring into a webcam. I wish I were looking at you guys in person, but that gets us right into the topic of the pandemic and business models in journalism, which I'm going to be talking to you about. That was such a great big view that we had. Now, I'm going to take you down into one company's struggles with the pandemic and that's Canada's *National Observer*. So, a little bit about Canada's *National Observer*, for those of you who don't know. When I'm looking over to the side here,

I'm looking at my notes and I apologize for that, for not looking directly at you. We were founded five years ago, digital only, and we came into being mainly through crowdfunding. That was our business model, and we quickly realized it was too exhausting and moved into a subscriber-based paywalled publication. The aim is to become 100 percent reader-funded as soon as possible. It feels like an enormous task, often like pushing a boulder up a mountain, but we're getting there.

We had a lot of momentum going into the end of 2019. Our mission is to lead in the area of climate change coverage, energy, the environment, and a lot of our stories have to do with how ordinary people are facing up against the encroachment of industry in their real lives. Over time, since the beginning of the founding of *National Observer*, we have had 39 million page views, just to give you an idea of our size. Since March, I thought it might be interesting to note, we've had six million page views. Year over year, our revenue growth has been around 20 to 30 percent and we're divided down the middle right now between the revenue we get from subscriptions, and that includes group subscriptions from universities to NGOs to the government of Canada, and funded journalism — journalism that is either funded through crowdfunding efforts on the site or through collaborations with foundations and other philanthropists. We've been nominated or received every major journalism award in Canada, and we're really proud to have made it into the Trust Project this year. So, we have really high standards for our journalism.

But back in 2019, I can tell you, my life was incredibly busy. I was crisscrossing Canada all the time. I was really concerned about the paradox of the CEO of a company who is focused on climate change flying. Well, that got solved for me pretty fast. My daily life had so much complexity in it then that I really longed for it to stop. I had no idea how it would stop, and it certainly did stop. The pandemic hit and all of you know how it was yourselves. It was like life seemed to stop at first. That simplicity I had longed for was here, but not how I'd hoped for it. I was in a state of shock. I worried a lot. As CEO of Observer Media Group, my first priority was securing the jobs of our staff.

It was hard to know for sure what the total shutdown of the economy was going to mean. I pulled everybody together, told them what was going on, and we battened down the hatches, went through every line item in the budget, cut everything I could, let go of our offices in Vancouver, Toronto and in Ottawa, and just cut everything, really, that wasn't related to people. With the pandemic taking lives, upending lives, the plan that I had made the year before to raise money around climate reporting just didn't seem viable. I didn't feel that I could go out and ask people to fund climate reporting when people were worrying about whether they had a job, whether their restaurant was going to stay open, whether they were going to qualify for government assistance or be left out in the cold.

And then I think a thing that people don't really think about that often is, well, particularly in the case of the pandemic, journalists themselves were going through a lot of hard things on a personal level. We had one staff member who came down with COVID very early on. We had another person on our staff who tested positive for the virus and fortunately didn't get sick, and then there were just a lot of us who had parents in care or elderly parents. My own mother is 90 years old and living in Manhattan. One of our key staff people, her dad died from COVID alone, and

so there were a lot of things going on emotionally in people's personal lives. Then on top of that, watching what was going on in the world from Black Lives Matter, George Floyd, the increasing insanity of Donald Trump, disinformation about COVID-19 coming straight from the White House.

It was, I would say, hard to manage. I can tell you, there was one day where I just closed myself in my new office, being my home with three teenagers, my husband and my dog and everybody working from home, right? There was isolation. It was overwhelming, and I had a couple of times when I really thought, "I just don't know how I can do this." But in March, traffic surged. We had, I think this was across the media landscape, we had about a million-and-a-half readers in March, which was pretty big for us. Although we actually stopped asking people to subscribe, we really stopped our marketing efforts in March. We didn't feel we could do that, and we took the paywall down like so many other media companies did and declared our coverage free, but people kept subscribing.

That was really moving for me to see, that people clearly valued extra-value journalism during that period. What was remarkable was that they subscribed at the full rate, which for us is \$139 a year, which is quite a lot for people. Also in March, something else happened that meant a lot to us organizationally. We receive grants from the Local Journalism Initiative. For those of you who aren't Canadian, that is a government effort to help newspapers, in particular, stay in business, but it included digital media. This program has funded 210 journalism jobs this year, and that provided some stability to my organization. That program's not perfect. It has a lot of flaws and I'm happy to talk about them, but probably not today. Maybe another conference. But the fact that that assistance kicked in right as the pandemic was sweeping over Canada, I think it created more stability in the industry than would have been there even though a lot of jobs were still cut, and it was pretty grim.

I got heavily into Zoom because, frankly, I wanted to connect. My life up until that point had been full of people and relationship building, and I felt quite cut off. I started interviewing people. The first guest was David Suzuki and the second was Noam Chomsky, and that was quite remarkable. It was so energizing that we kept going on with it, and recently have had more guests. Molly Jong-Fast was just on a couple of days ago. And through that we've been able to re-energize our subscription campaign and also reach new audiences. Then on the anniversary of Canada's federal election, which happened in 2019, we released our own report on disinformation, which was very satisfying to do at a time when so much, like I said, is coming from the White House in the United States about such a life-and-death matter as COVID-19.

National Observer has always been here due to not just being a disruptor, I don't think we're that disruptive, but we have been able to embrace new technologies and make use of them and we'll continue to do that. We will continue to try to stay on the edge and move into new areas. We're moving into podcasting. We will be looking for what's the next way to talk with audiences. I think in the future that journalism has to be more connected. It has to help people look beyond right now to the future in a way that, I don't think it's our job to create hope, but I think it is our job to help people be in touch with solutions that are happening, visionary people. There's so much bad news because that's what creates headlines.

I will agree with the last speaker. News as a business has a lot of problems. We're seeing them everywhere now. News as a public good can bring a lot of solutions and help a lot of people. I hope going forward that news really finds its place as a public good, finds the support that it needs, whether it's through readers, whether it's through philanthropy, whether it is through governments that find a way to do that. That's the future, and I hope we get there soon. Thank you.

Colette Watson:

Thank you, Linda. That was very inspirational. I think the hardest thing to do as the editor-in-chief, owner, boss is to keep the business afloat, keep everyone healthy and bring everyone in. I mean, you've had to make very tough decisions over the last seven months, and it sounds like things went really well for you. We have a voracious audience out there looking for information on a daily basis. So thankfully, with companies like yours, they are being fed on a daily basis. I'm really thrilled that you have worked so hard at keeping everyone employed and healthy. Thank you, also, for participating in this conference.

Our next panellist is Jesse Brown. Jesse is a podcast host and publisher of Canadaland, a leading source of media criticism in Canada. The Canadaland news site and podcast network focuses on Canadian media and politics. Its podcasts are downloaded 100,000 times per week. That's pretty amazing. As a freelancer, Brown has produced content for *The National Post*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Vice*, the CBC, TVO, *Toronto Life* and *Maclean's* as well as many others. At the height of the pandemic in April 2020, Jesse reported that, "We've never used the news more. We've never needed the news more. But the news industry has never been more degraded." Welcome to the panel Jesse.

Jesse Brown:

Thank you for having me. I think that the focus of this panel is really apt. I think it's open to interpretation. Journalism in the time of crisis, the mind goes to the current crisis of the pandemic. Perhaps, broader than that, the crisis that the business is facing because of Facebook and Google. I think that fake news gets invoked a lot, the crisis that we see with the specter of fake news. I would define the problem more broadly than that, because I think there's a danger of us saying, "Okay, now we're in crisis," the idea is, "Well, we weren't before. Before this crisis, things were good." The fact is the newspaper circulation peaked in 1984, and after 1990 was just heading down ever since. I think that there is a crisis in credibility with cable news. I say all these things and all these criticisms with great respect for the reporters and the journalists who take their work seriously within newspapers, within cable news.

But I think that you can draw a straight line from O.J. Simpson to Donald Trump. There was a crisis in credibility where people just year after year stopped believing that the talking heads on television were representing them, were representing their interests, were telling them the truth. The business model, any journalism delivery system, any business model that relied on amassing an audience and then selling it to advertisers, as opposed to actually having a straight deal with the news consumer, "We will report news. You'll pay us to do that," I think that the news was incredibly vulnerable. So the crisis has been going on for decades and decades, and it's a crisis that I think, as an industry, journalism had ignored. It is not merely technological in its origin, and what the pandemic is doing is multiplying the impact of that. So that's how I would define the crisis writ large.

I can talk about Canadaland a little bit and about how we've responded to this. As mentioned, Canadaland is a podcast network and news organization. Our chief focus has been on media reporting in the media news, but we've expanded through the years to cover a number of other things. We have a similar approach to *The Observer* in that it's sort of a hybrid between we are crowdfunded for the majority of our revenue, but it's somewhere between subscription and mission based. We can't say donation. We're not a charity. What we have is a system where people subscribe to content that we give away for free. We do not have a paywall for everything, but a few little bonus items here and there. It's more of a PBS or NPR model where our thousands of funders have told us, "If you put this behind a paywall, I will stop paying you for it." People are paying to get our content, but they're also paying for everybody else to have it.

We're now reaching over 150,000 people a week with our podcasts, but only about 7,000 people pay for it. They're immensely proud that they're paying for everybody else to have it. They're immensely proud when we break news stories like the WE Charity scandal in Canada that touched the highest levels of government. When we hold government to account, there's a tiny group of people that are fuelling that. We do have advertising on our podcasts and that revenue basically evaporated when the pandemic hit. But we were pandemic-proof because our traffic surged, and we could directly appeal to our audience who were looking to us for answers. We have an alignment of interests where, when it looked like we're losing a lot of revenue here, we need to redouble our commitment to our audience.

How can we be of service? How can we be of highest service? We took on a number of initiatives. On the main podcast we went from twice a week to daily, and we just started publishing these missives, these isolation interviews, where I realized, as a podcaster, people welcome me into their car or into their ears as they go on a jog at a time when people are feeling very isolated from one another. So, I would just talk to politicians or to Margaret Atwood, have these conversations that were more just human-interest pieces. Meanwhile, we did investigative reporting into the government's lack of response in Canada's prisons where there's since been a COVID outbreak. One of our series that was already in the midst of a different season just shifted gears on the spot and focused on long-term care, where the overwhelming majority of deaths in Canada have been.

They did a series of harrowing documentaries about the neglect that preceded the pandemic, and that was resulting in these deaths during the pandemic. So, our business solution was also our editorial and our journalistic solution. How can we provide the best journalism, the best stories, the best connection we can? We saw that our audience stepped up for us. Just as Linda was expressing, people recognize the need for information, for connection in a way that I think the pandemic just drove that home, and we saw our subscription rates go up. We just launched our annual crowdfunding drive earlier this week, and it's so far been our best one yet. I don't want to take up my time here boasting about our model. I think it's relevant to a panel like this because I think that one way or the other, the suggestion here is where journalism needs to go.

We need a direct deal. We can't get people's attention based on the funny pages and a crossword puzzle and recipes and Sunshine Girls, and then use the money

from that to pay for some news. We have to sell people news. I butt up against the idea that we can't do that and that the business is just, let's abandon the idea that it can be a business. I think that if we scale it to the right size, it is sustainable. I don't judge any other publishers. Whatever methods they take to keep the lights on and keep journalists reporting is the right way to go. But I am very concerned about what happens when we sacrifice independence and become dependent on government subsidies. It speaks to the basic commitment we have to hold government to account. If we are dependent on their funding, the crisis in credibility that I see every day in social media responses to journalists, "Who is paying you to tell me these things?" We are again messing with the basic units that fuel us, the basic contract we have with our audience.

I think it is possible for us. I know that it was said earlier in this conference, it was lamented that only 13 percent of the population is willing to pay for news. It's up from nine percent, by the way. There are many, many lucrative businesses that would love to have 13 percent of the population as a possible market base. We can work within that and a lot of the costs of doing this, the hard costs of broadcasting, of newspaper publication are gone. We can directly fuel journalism itself, but I think we need to right-size the industry. I think what Linda is doing is exactly right. We focused on media. Another news organization focuses on climate. I don't think we're going to have a big banner news about everything, one stop for all. I think it's going to be niched like that, and we've got to start rebuilding something that works for people that puts the journalism first.

Colette Watson:

Thank you, Jesse. That was incredibly insightful. Line of the day, "Straight line from O.J. to Donald Trump." That really got me thinking. Let's just flow right into Janine. We are incredibly lucky to have Janine Warner. She is a Knight Fellow for the International Center for Journalists. She's the co-founder and executive director of Sembra Media and has written or coauthored over 25 books about the internet, including *Websites for Dummies* and *Global Mobile*. Janine's taught a series of massive online courses for the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas at the University of Texas, as well as courses in online journalism at the University of Southern California and the University of Miami. She has been doing some research over the past few months, and we are incredibly lucky and fortunate to have her here today to share some of that research results with us.

Janine Warner:

Thank you so much for that lovely introduction. I have been doing a lot of research on people like our previous two guests. Jesse and Linda are perfect examples of what we call entrepreneurial journalists, and I think there's never been a more important time for news to be led by journalists. One of the big sea changes that I've seen in my lifetime, starting with my own little entrepreneurial project when I was way too young to take on starting a business. I started my career as a bilingual journalist in Northern California and launched a Spanish-language newspaper in the early 1990s. In many ways it was a great success, audience impact, all of that. As a business, it was a complete failure.

Many, many years later, many jobs and much business experience later, I run an organization that's dedicated to helping other socially minded dedicated journalists who are crazy enough to try and start their own organizations and run their own media sites like Jesse and Linda. With your permission, I have a PowerPoint slide

that'll help me illustrate some of my points. I will just jump right in and try and use my 10 minutes to share just a few lessons I've learned from other journalists who have started media organizations. As Colette mentioned, I have a fellowship from the International Center for Journalists that supports my work on Sembra Media, an organization that I co-founded with a partner who's based in Argentina, who also was an entrepreneur, and learned the hard way that if you don't have business skills, it's hard to make it work in the long term. We started out with the premise that we should never do anything until we study it first. So Sembra Media began as a big research project. Today you'll find numerous case studies, reports, some of which are in English as well as Spanish, and a media directory that we've spent a lot of time developing and really forms the basis of our network of networks. And all the teaching and all the training we do is born directly out of our research.

We have an international team that spent more than five years studying digital media with a focus on Spanish language. That means we work in the US Hispanic market, all of Latin America and Spain. And in those markets, looking for media with a very specific criteria for transparency, independence and some kind of social value, we fund more than 800 media organizations led by journalists or other socially minded founders who are trying to serve their community, sometimes in extremely challenging places such as Cuba and Venezuela and Nicaragua. In this directory, you can search by country, by content type, by business model, what kind of revenue they have. If you wanted to know all of the media sites in Mexico that cover the environment and use membership as a monetization model, that's the kind of thing you can do in this directory.

It's only in Spanish, but Google translate can help you and your friends who speak Spanish can help you. And our mission is really helping other entrepreneurial journalists learn from each other and study the market before they launch new kinds of media. When I say we, I am referring to having a very diverse international team of what we call ambassadors. They all work part-time, representing the media in their country and qualifying mapping and researching the media in their countries. We also have a relatively small operations team with my co-founder, Mijal Iastrebnier, we call her Mij, in Argentina that help us with our various new initiatives. We just turned five years old this month. You and I, Linda, should have a drink and celebrate our anniversary soon. And thanks to some pretty significant grant support in the last couple of years, we now actually give sub-grants to some of the media we work with and provide a lot of consulting and have an accelerator program that's designed for really taking these journalism-led organizations from starting to build an audience to actually having a sustainable business. It's an ambitious goal and one that we are experimenting with actively.

I also have a group of professors that are trying to help improve the quality of entrepreneurial journalism training in universities and get more communications schools to teach business skills to journalists. I'm just going to share with you three quick things that I've learned from this research, and then I'll be happy to integrate more of it into the question-and-answer time. The first one is to create a community, not an audience. I think Jesse spoke to this really well of trying to speak to the people he works with and not just at them, with them, listen to them.

One of the best examples we have in Spanish that's similar to their models is from Madrid, Spain, elDiario.es. They produce a daily news organization with a pretty significant team. Seventy percent of the organization is owned by the editors and journalists of the organization. They got a little initial investment and like Jesse, their model is part membership and part advertising. They do not have a paywall, but they do have some very interesting ways that they motivate people to become members. So for eight euros month or 80 euros a year or more, some people donate more, you can become a socio of their news organization. And if you're a socio, you get two key things. They offer a number of benefits.

But there are two that really seem to move the needle. First, you get a login. And if you have a login because you're a member, the advertising disappears. So if you don't pay, you see ads. If you do pay, you don't see ads. And with that model, they started at about a 60-40 balance between advertising and membership. They've moved closer to 50-50 because of the pandemic. When they started losing advertising, as the pandemic started, like everybody else did last year, their members stepped up, increased what they were willing to pay in their membership group. And that's one of the reasons that it seems to be a good balance to not only rely on one or the other.

The other thing that they do that I think is brilliant is lots of newsletters. And one of them is a daily morning update they send out every day. They cover a niche of news that many of the other dailies in Madrid do not cover. And if you're a member, you get that morning update the night before. And just getting that news a little before everybody else seems to be one of the big incentives to drive membership to their organization. This is not from me. This is from a French journalist who attended one of our conferences in Peru a couple of years ago. And I just love this quote: "email is the cockroach of the internet." I've studied all kinds of membership models around the world. It's definitely a trend, reader-supported news. Do not underestimate how much email drives that. Email newsletters and personal appeals in those newsletters seems to be one of the number one ways in which most of these organizations get members. I'm sure email will outlive the rest of us, much like the cockroach as well.

But I also want to manage expectations. I think anytime there's this big new thing, everybody should be reader supported, everybody should rely on members. It's easy to get distorted in what that means. And to manage expectations. We've really looked at what is reasonable to expect in terms of membership support. Linda, if you pull off 100 percent audience support, that's awesome, but you will be in the extreme minority of news organizations if you do. What we have found in our work and this is actually from one of our board members, Patricia Taurus Bird, who lives in Prague, and works with media all over the world. She works with the Media Development Investment Fund, which is a philanthropic investment organization and she said if you look at top of the funnel, you have 100 percent of your unique visitors. Then you go down to your heavy users, brand lovers, your most loyal users. You're lucky if that's 18 to 23 percent of your audience, which actually come back regularly and are your loyal users. Of them, what we find after studying many, many different membership models and news is that about 0.03 percent of your most loyal users will end up paying for your organization.

So, 13 percent of Canada is a great place to start, but don't assume that much of your audience might support you necessarily. And remember that lots of people are trying this. Now to give you some real numbers to put that in perspective, this is what it looks like for [elDiario.es](#). They have 9.5 million unique visitors in a typical month. About 23 percent of them are loyal. They're at the higher end. Some people get to 30 percent. That's very rare. And they've got 0.03 percent heavy users who have become socios, which give them more than 65,000 actual members. And they make millions of euros every year on that. It's a huge part of their revenue, but it took them six years to get to 0.03 percent of their loyal users as members. I share that because sometimes I see these tiny start-ups thinking they are going to be membership supported, and it's really hard to get to significant numbers if you don't have a significant audience.

Now, I'm going to tell you, some people will give you a lot more than eight euros a month. And at the end of this, I'll try and give some hope for the smaller ones about how audience support can still help you. If you want to learn more about membership, I can't recommend more highly the Membership Puzzle Project. Just go to [membershippuzzleproject.org](#) or Google it and you'll find not only lots of case studies from around the world about membership programs, but they recently came out with a detailed membership guide. Step-by-step, what it takes, what you should do, how you should lay the groundwork, what kind of messaging. It's really powerful guide. And I really believe in membership as one of the most valuable ways to build revenue for independent media. I think you have to be careful not to believe it's going to be the only one for most of us.

This is why lesson number two is diversified revenue, which is the key to independence and sustainability. Everywhere we go, we hear about diversified revenue, don't rely on any one source. And we really have come to believe that the most resilient organizations, the ones that make it through the pandemic, the ones that really maintain their independence in very tough environments, economically and politically, are the ones that have a wide variety of different sources of revenue. This is some of the things we've found that media organizations are doing. I know a lot of people go, "Wait, what do they do?" Donations, agency models where they're creating services and products for clients, a whole range of different advertising models. If you go to [data.sembremedia.org](#), you'll find a very intensive research project we did. We called it Inflection Point. It came on a few years ago, but it's published in English, Spanish and Portuguese. It's a 60-page heavily illustrated report where we looked very deeply at business models, how they were making money, how they were spending it. I offer that as one of the main sources of information we produce in English, Spanish and Portuguese. But we're about to renew that, so next year we'll come out with a new version of that, and we're going to expand it to look at some media in Africa and Asia as well this time. I'm very excited about what we'll find as we take a more global look. But having talked with people such as Alan Soon, for many years he and I have traded ideas and resources and insights. A lot of the things that I found that work in Latin America and Spain also work in Southeast Asia and Africa, and they also work in Canada and the United States.

Essentially, we found two paths to sustainability. Very loyal niche audiences, especially particularly valuable audiences. There's a very interesting one in Brazil that covers legal issues and has many different newsletters specifically for business interests around laws that might affect their business. So combining a niche with loyal or high-value audiences is a great way to make your small audience sustainable and large audiences of course, are where you can get to membership advertising and other things on a greater scale.

The third lesson, and the last one before my final tip, is the biggest mistake that I have seen made by journalists who want to start an organization is that a few journalists get together, and they launch a new site and they don't think about diversity. And when I say diversity, I'm not just saying there should be men and women. There should be people that reflect the audience in whatever diversity that is. When I talk about diversity in this case, I'm talking about, you need somebody focused on business. You need somebody focused on marketing and audience. You need somebody thinking about OMG don't forget about accounting. I've never met a journalist who went to journalism school for accounting. It's a weak spot for many of the people we work with. And it's one we really have to push. So, two or three journalists get together and start a new site. It's kind of like two or three chefs get together and start a restaurant. You're going to have lots of fun in the kitchen. Somebody has to bring in the audience. Somebody has to order food for tomorrow and oh yeah, somebody has to do the accounting. When we studied deeply what their teams look like, I wasn't surprised. This is the median size of the teams and the media we work with, about 10 people working on content, one in technology, kind of the web designer and effectively zero in sales, and this is why. Because the founders are the only ones trying to raise money for the organization, but they're also the editor, and they're also travelling around the country, and you can't do it all and focus on business.

Here's what we found when we looked deeply into it. When we looked at media that did not have anyone paid exclusively in business development or sales, their median revenues were a little less than \$5,000 for the year. Now, remember these are Latin American dollars, but still. When we compare them with the media and our audience that did have at least one person paid to focus on business development and sales, their median revenues went up to \$115,000 a year. It's that big a difference. So, until you diversify your team, until you've got somebody on your wonderfully dedicated journalism team thinking about business and making money, it's really hard to move the needle to full sustainability. And we only focus on that because we believe financial security and financial independence is the key to good journalism, especially in the long term.

I promised I'd leave you with a story to give hope to the smaller media who want member support and really something that I've used as a story in many places to try and do what we call change the chip in the heads of journalists. A lot of the journalists we work with are in countries where the government is not as kind and gentle as Canada. And I share your concern, Jesse, about people getting too dependent on government support. In places like Venezuela, the government took more and more control over journalism until there really wasn't independent journalism in most media, and the independent voices that left and started new organizations are the only ones that can do it.

But this story is actually from California. *The Voice of Orange County* was started by a Cuban American, but it's an English-language political journalism site with a lot of reader support. You can donate in a number of levels. You can do a lot of the things that your membership models are doing. But the story that stands out for me from my dear friend, Norberto, about getting donations that sometimes are more than you expect. He said, "A few years ago, somebody came to me from my audience, and they offered me a \$50,000 donation." And as I like to say in Latin America, even in California, \$50,000 is a pretty serious donation level. And he said, "But I really struggled because it was one of these guys who was really well-known, extreme conservative, very wealthy member of Orange County. And I was afraid that if I took his money, I put the names of everybody who donates on my website, people would think he'd bought some kind of influence on my organization. And I just was afraid to take his donation. But I thought about it some more. And I thought, maybe that's not the right answer."

And here's what he did. He went to another audience member that he knew was also fairly wealthy and much more progressive. And he said, "That crazy conservative offered me 50,000 bucks. Can you match it so I can keep my independence?" And you know what? He walked away with a \$100,000. And that's my advice to journalists. Think about how to get revenue everywhere you can, so nobody can control you or have too much influence in how you do your journalism. I hope that inspires you and gives you some new ideas. I'll be happy to answer questions. Thank you so much for your time.

Colette Watson: Thank you, Janine. That was really fascinating. I spend my days working at the Cable Public Affairs Channel, which I guess you would equate to C-SPAN in the United States. And so balancing objectivity is our primary goal. And our chief anchor, anytime we do an election coverage, if I've managed to get complaints from all parties, I know he's done his job. So I see your point about going across the street and getting \$50,000 from the other guy, that's exactly how you do it. Piss them all off and protect your independence.

Linda Solomon Wood: And he definitely boosted his own credibility to be able to tell that story. I get money from Conservatives and Liberals and I'm the independent political voice. I think that makes it stronger, not weaker. It's not easy to do, but it's definitely the better answer than just turning down somebody because you think they'll control you better.

Colette Watson: Exactly. Linda, I was curious to hear more about the transition you went through in terms of having to pivot the business from a single-issue focus to where we are now at in a pandemic and I need to be more and larger, and then cut my team down and keep them all safe and adjusting to homing from work, as opposed to working from home. How did you go from being an environmental reporter to all right, we're in the middle of a pandemic, this is what we're going to do? How did that happen? What did you do?

Linda Solomon Wood: First of all, what I said really was that I didn't feel we could go out and raise money around climate change. But it was true too, that it became really important to report on the pandemic and reporters are versatile. They'd have to speak for themselves about this, but I think it was pretty easy for our reporters to shift into reporting on

COVID and they did it and they did it brilliantly. And we stuck with it for a while and then we started to feel like, no, the mainstream media has this. Sorry, not the mainstream media, large corporate media has this. And really, from the beginning, we've tried to step into areas where other media isn't. So we started to move back to covering climate change and the environment, but keeping our eyes on other things as well. But we're not reporting on the pandemic every day. We're leaving that to CP.

Colette Watson: But the pandemic is impacting everything we do in every aspect of every day of our lives.

Linda Solomon Wood: Absolutely.

Colette Watson: I remember having a conversation with someone a few weeks ago. We had to make some changes here at the office just to protect them in terms of bringing people into the studio and density and making sure everyone's health and safety was taken care of. As part of that, we had to put our communal dishes away and say you're not allowed to use the dishes anymore. Here's a bunch of plastic single-use forks and knives and paper plates. And you're going oh my God, we're regressing with respect to recycling and being environmentally conscious. I saw a Deloitte report, this would have been around May, where China was perhaps three or four months ahead of us in the progression of the pandemic and the post-pandemic world. So, first thing is auto advertising took a crater here in Canada. It just died in terms of you're running an ad-supported business, say local radio, for example, the automotive industry was a big revenue getter. That just disappeared overnight. If you're running a business, you're wondering when is that going to come up?

Public transit was supposed to take cars off the road, create an environmentally more sustainable world that we live in. But as Wuhan started to go back to normal, only 25 percent of the workforce went back to work, say sometime around March, but 100 percent of the car traffic was back on the roads in Wuhan. That meant people were eschewing public transit. Individuals were getting in their cars because they were afraid of public transit, didn't want to take public transit. I think there's a story around the first few weeks of the pandemic, which was let's look at the pollution reduction in China. Then all of a sudden now, some of the advances we've made on environmental sustainability are parked. There are a lot of stories there that are pandemic related.

Linda Solomon Wood: Absolutely.

Colette Watson: Have you covered any of those?

Linda Solomon Wood: Yes, we have. And a big thrust for us also was covering how the Government of Canada was going to include really forward thinking, robust green stimulus, green programs into the stimulus package, the recovery package. There's a lot of debate about whether they did or whether they didn't. But that became a big thrust for us, just keeping that on the radar. Can I just step back though and say, Janine, that was an amazing presentation. Thank you so much for that. And also, Jesse, I got so much out of yours as well.

Colette Watson: Thank you for that. Agreed. Janine, as part of your presentation, you talked about an accelerator programming. Is that something someone who is watching us today could participate in or talk to about?

Janine Warner: Well, that's lovely. No, we got a very special grant from Luminate, which is part of our media network. Again, a philanthropic investment organization, very focused in supporting media. And they gave us a couple million dollars and said, "Okay, go find some of these little media sites that you found in your research where they're having real impact. They have real audience, but they're in that chicken and egg, I can't hire a salesperson because I don't have any money and see if you can move the needle." We are in a kind of a year-and-a-half-long acceleration program. We selected 10 media out of almost 500 applicants in the Spanish-speaking world. We gave an initial part of investment to each of them and many, many hours of consulting. I developed a very complicated way of doing virtual consulting with media because one of the things I saw in a lot of accelerators is they try and bring the founders to a central place, New York, San Francisco, Buenos Aires and spend three months working on your project and then you'll be off.

That works okay if you're doing an iPhone app. It doesn't work so well if you're doing a local news organization or if you're trying to cover the politics in your country. So I came up with a model where we have strategic consultants that work with them on project lands. We're really based on an initial assessment. What are your strengths and weaknesses? What are your opportunities? What of these many different business models we found might work for you? And they have this regular consultant, strategic consultant that kind of holds their hand, kicks them in the button, and let's have quiet on their shoulders every week for six months.

Colette Watson: Wow.

Janine Warner: We have a team of tactical consultants who come in with very specialized skills. And one of the things I learned doing this myself is there's no one person that can solve all the problems of a media organization. So if they need help with programmatic advertising, we've got an expert. If they need her help with search engine optimization, we have an expert. When we're went to do sexual harassment policies, which was one of the things the funder wanted and something my feminist-led team really believes strongly. We hired a whole gender consulting team to develop a set of protocols they could use to develop policies for their organizations. Then we ran into the challenge we run into all the time. The laws are different in each country, the rules are different in each country, and we needed tactical consultants in each country to help them through the final part of that process.

So, the accelerator is a complicated story in itself. We hope to renew that grant. We're right now in the impossible situation of taking those 10 down to six that we believe are the best out of the 10, and they will get a much bigger infusion of money and a lot more consulting. At the end of this, we hope they're actually sustainable, close to sustainable. We think one of them might even be scalable and ready for investment. Fingers crossed, we knock it out of the park with that. But everything we learned from this, we'll be sharing in a report in Spanish, English and Portuguese. The top-level research that we do such as that, we do try to share.

- Colette Watson:** That is a great idea. That's a great way to do it rather than just handing out grants. That is brilliant. Congrats on that.
- Janine Warner:** We learned very quickly, and we have confirmed over and over, that if you just give them grants in reporting, that gets great reporting done. I'll never say you shouldn't do that, but it sets them up to never have the time and bandwidth to build a business around it. So giving the money focused on building the business, so they can use that money to do journalism is how we think we can get them to work longer. Remember, we're working in countries where government funding isn't just a potential problem, Jesse, it's a huge problem. One that most of the people we work with have to avoid.
- Colette Watson:** Brilliant. Jesse, that's a great segue. I was going to ask you for your opinion on if the grant program isn't it, is there another way for federal help to be had for media? In Canada, having been at this and appeared before numerous parliamentary committees and regulatory hearings, Canadian English media, French not so much, but English media, is impacted greatly by the American influence. We all speak in English. Canada, it's the same language. There's an overwhelming influence and the federal government has a lot of angst over the disappearance or the decline or it could be the order of the natural decline, but the protection, which is maybe the bad word, of local media in Canada. Who's going to tell local stories to Canadians for Canadians, by Canadians, and should the government intervene on that? Jesse, do you have any thoughts on that?
- Jesse Brown:** I do, in terms of the emphasis on local news. That is a minority of the government funding, and even that funding is being controlled by the newspaper lobby group. The vast majority of that is going to the members of that specific industry lobby group. There are problems within even that purported mission of funding local journalism. But what is the role for government in trying to help rebuild the new media? Sustain that which can be sustained from the past, very straightforward.
- I built a business with my colleagues around delivering current affairs and news and investigation via podcast. We did so in Canada when there was no Canadian podcast industry. We sold advertisements on our podcasts and we funded journalism through listener support and advertisements. Then the CBC started its own podcasting unit, which is great. I'm a big supporter for public broadcasting. Make podcasts, CBC should be doing that. They went after our advertisers.
- For some reason, my own public broadcaster that I'm happy to support through my tax dollars, which I'm happy to have as colleagues, for some reason, this is something that you'll hear from digital publishers across Canada, if they move into a market where the CBC has abandoned that market, and they prove that news can be a viable business in a small community, CBC is back in that community. If you prove a business model that CBC did not, if you pioneer a business model, CBC will come and compete with you. Our newspapers have a very legitimate gripe with the CBC having its own website, competing for banner advertisements. As a former CBC-er and as a public broadcast supporter, I think that CBC should absolutely have a web presence. They should absolutely have a strong website.

The advertisements, from a user's point of view are terrible. They are low quality. When you watch videos on the CBC's website, there are four pre-roll ads. Often the same ad repeats four times before you can get to the content. Why does this exist? Instead of moving away from that direction, the CBC launches a branded podcasting wing, explicitly leveraging the credibility of their news brand to make content for corporate partners. Get out of the way, is my advice, is my demand of the government. I'm not out here with my hand out, as another digital publisher said, I'm here with my hand up. Stop targeting my business or funding the CBC to target my business. Put in place strict rules for ad-free public broadcasting. Another measure, which has in effect, but it's not being done to the degree where it actually would be helpful, is if you're going to actually get involved on a more direct financial level, allow people to have a significant subsidy for their digital news subscriptions. That way you take the government out of the position of having to pay dues.

Colette Watson: More than \$75 a year?

Jesse Brown: \$75, and what is the uptake on that? So there's a tiny subsidy that's been introduced. We don't even qualify for this because we will not go before the government and say, "Please stamp us with your approved journalist stamp." That is the end of our independence as we see it. Therefore, we won't even participate in that program. The whole point of a program like that, where people can choose their own media and choose who they think is a viable journalist, then receive some sort of a tax subsidy. It probably needs to be a more significant one than what is currently offered. But first and foremost, my own government has to stop directly funding this. Now that they're funding, through the media bailout, the major newspapers, they're doing it in another way as well. Because all of those major newspapers have their own podcasting operations. Now my government is betting against my business and all my competitors are receiving this government money. Stop doing that would be the first thing I would ask of my government.

Colette Watson: Eighty-five percent of the government's ad spend is on Facebook and Google. So add that to list.

Jesse Brown: They're doing that, and then when they do an ad spend, they can pick and choose which media. If you look at how the money was dispersed, an expression of government-approved media, government-approved press to the exclusion of those, there are all sorts of insidious ways that the government can prop up the media that it wants to prop up and try to starve, or even directly compete with and target media that, for whatever reason, they choose not to. That's a dangerous situation.

Colette Watson: That's fascinating. We have a question from someone in our audience. Janine, I think it's aimed at you. Do you think a consortium or philanthropic organizations dedicated to journalism like the Knight Foundation or Poynter Institute could work for new media in Canada? And David asks the others on the panel, "Do we think that creating something like the Knight Foundation would work for us here in Canada?"

Janine Warner: Let me just say, I'm a huge fan of the Knight Foundation, as someone who had the Knight supported fellowship from the International Center for Journalists. But they

can only do so much. In fact, one of the things the Knight Foundation has done in the last couple of years that I think is very smart, is to try to get all the other local foundations in the United States to think about local news as a place to contribute.

The Knight Foundation has organized big events in Miami, where they are based, and half the audience are local charitable foundations that make donations to children's organizations and arts groups and other places. The other half are independent news organizations, like the ones that Linda and Jesse run, and they try to put them together. They're really trying to get, not just that one big, wonderful Knight Foundation, and there are a few other media-focused foundations around, but really all the little ones, all the family ones, all the private donors, seeing and recognizing that independent news is as vital and important as anything else that you make donations to.

Colette Watson: Linda and Jesse, any thoughts on if something like that could work here?

Linda Solomon Wood: I'd like to say something about independence and just raise that for us to think about for a moment. Yes, absolutely, more philanthropic support in Canada. We need that for journalism. Every news company is owned or run by someone, by a person. *The Washington Post* has Jeff Bezos behind them. *The New York Times* has the *New York Times* family on the board of directors. Sulzberger comes from that family. There has been billionaire investment in it. All of us have to take money from somewhere. So the question is, I think, what is your relationship between you as an organization and whatever the money is that's coming into it?

The reason that I'm aiming for reader support is because I do think that's where the truest independence can come from. Believe me, we got feedback from our subscribers and they're not always happy with what we're doing. I've thought about this so much, and Jesse, I appreciate what you're saying about the government and as you know, I'm more of a fan of the program than you are because I think it's really flawed. Again, we could talk about it. We should have a special panel on it, but I think it was a good effort, even though a flawed one.

But about independence. I am the CEO. I am the editor-in-chief of *National Observer*. The real question is how independent can it be for me? I have nothing to do with what our reporters write. I never get in there and say, stop it, or you didn't say the right thing. I stand back. I do stand back a lot because I am the person who is out getting the money. But I think we need to be realistic and honest with ourselves about our wish and the complexity of independence.

Jesse Brown: I think philanthropy is definitely one of the solutions, and I think that there's a growing willingness from family foundations. It's something that needs to be developed in Canada in particular. It's much stronger in the United States. To Linda's point, we're not independent from ourselves or from our own editorial judgments. I agree with Linda that the purest version of this is the reader who wants the news. People wake up every morning and they want to know what's going on. I feel like we sell ourselves short. Present company is excluded here because Linda is an exceptional entrepreneur, who is out there making this business happen and for many years has created an incredible organization. Wider industry, I think the feeling is, we've tried nothing and we're all out of ideas.

There is a public out there that is desperate to know what's really happening every day and the past isn't dead, even if the past business models are. The practice of journalism, the craft of it, and the system of verification is desperately needed right now. So the past has something to offer to the future. Absolutely, when we talk about influencers, I keep my eye on all of the Instagram accounts that are filling the void and not everybody is a fake news charlatan, or a horrible bogeyman. There are lots of people who don't come from our world of journalism, who are telling people real things every day and they're really interesting. We should keep our eye on them, but they do not come from a tradition of verifying information. We need to bring these skills into these new ways of telling stories and sell them because people need them.

That's a big jump from nine percent of people willing to pay from news to 13 percent. What does that tell you? People are scared. People are looking at a future where you cannot trust anybody and that terrifies them. Our skillset, which I think was neglected for many years and I think it was deprioritized in many newsrooms as we got into more opinion, as we got into more lifestyle stuff. Stuff that I really like and I've done a lot of it myself. But the first principles of journalism have never been more needed than they are right now, and they're marketable. I think that you take that product to market and you say, I want to sell you a service, not really a product, a service, and I based it on my record. I based it on my record of accuracy. I based it on my record of accountability. When I do get things wrong, as every journalist does, it's those first principles of journalism that the world needs more than anything else we can provide.

I think that we shouldn't overthink these things. I don't have a very sophisticated business sense. I just asked our audience, I can't do this anymore if you don't pay me to, and they paid. Then the next year I said, okay, now we want to go into Thunder Bay and tell those stories. Will you pay us to do that? They paid us to do that. Sometimes we've asked for things and said, will you pay us to do this? We didn't get there, so we didn't do it. We're in this constant negotiation with our audience as to what they want to see covered, and each year we say, how did we do last year? We promised you this last year, you paid for it. If we came through on that, I think we've earned your trust that we can now do this next thing. Do you agree that this next thing is a good thing? That's the way that we're negotiating this.

We use money. That's how people buy our services. It's working. I think it's going to work on a much more granular neighbourhood. You're going to have your friendly neighbourhood journalists just as you have a barber. This is the scale. There's 12 of us, we're a micro-organization, but we do stories that break national news. I think it can be replicated. I'm not looking to scale it necessarily. I want it to be a turnkey thing that other people do on different beats, as opposed to us doing it times 10 or times a hundred.

Colette Watson:

Well, I think you've captured the engagement. That's the key to continuing, engaging with your audience. Mainstream broadcasters were not able to do that anymore because it was so broad and one-way, in terms of passivity. I was struck by when Linda was speaking pre-pandemic. Did I get this right Linda, you had six million page views and since March you've had 30 million page views.

Linda Solomon Wood: No, sorry. That was the other way around. So all-time, 36 million page views, and then since March six million page views.

Colette Watson: Right.

Janine Garner: In your first five years, you did that. Wow, that is big growth. So that total was your first five years, and then this is the last few months.

Linda Solomon Wood: Right.

Colette Watson: So you hit your annual growth in six months, boldly. Where I was going is, that people are craving. They are going to you because they want your product, they want information, they want more. That's the sign that it's working. We have time for one last question. It's aimed at Jesse. Jesse the CBC will be selling ads on its website and podcasts to hedge against a future when government funding may be significantly cut. I agree it's galling for it to compete against Indy publishers, but does relying solely on government funding make the CBC vulnerable?

Jesse Brown: It does. For the same caution, the CBC is not independent. It is editorially independent, to whatever degree you can be when you're completely existentially dependent. Depending on who is the next prime minister, CBC's fortunes rise and fall, so they do have to hedge against that. We have a conservative leader who has stated that he wishes to gut the CBC. The CBC is perennially trying to hedge against that future. At the same time, they never received more money from the government than they do right now. They are massive, as everybody else is diminished. The resources they have to report the news are greater than they've ever had before. Criticizing the CBC or saying what the CBC should or shouldn't be doing is the national pastime. I'll engage with it because somebody asked. I think that they need to really look at some of the things that they're doing that Canadians, at least in terms of how we are expressing ourselves with our attention, don't value.

I think it's wonderful that *Schitt's Creek* did so well at the Emmys, but making dramatic, scripted television and making sitcoms is something that we're getting. That's taken care of elsewhere, and I don't know that my Canadian identity is necessarily reflected in the existence of *Schitt's Creek*, which probably could have been produced by somebody else. These are massively expensive undertakings that are making less money back than ever before because the TV ad market is in such terrible shape. Canadians have consistently said that what they value most from the CBC is news. Can you run a national news organization on \$1.2 billion?

Colette Watson: Yes.

Jesse Brown: I think you can. I think you can do that. I think you can do that without targeting the rest of the news industry and trying to run people out of business. So I take a pretty firm stance as to the ways that the CBC could be managing these things in a way that would not be as destructive as they are. This is, I think, something that unanimously, the rest of the news industry has raised to deaf ears.

Linda Solomon Wood: Absolutely it has.

Colette Watson: Thank you. Linda, in 30 seconds or less, because we're almost out of time. We have one last question for you, who funds the *National Observer* now?

Linda Solomon Wood: As I said, we have 50 percent of our funding coming from subscribers. That's individual subscribers and groups subscriptions. You can go to our About page and see, in detail, all of our funders. We have some funded journalism projects, like First Nations Forward and Canada's Clean Economy that are funded by foundations. We have the list of them on the site. If you have any ideas for further funding, can you get in touch with me?

Colette Watson: Think the person who wrote this question missed the part about how you took some government help, the local news fund, the local digital news fund.

Linda Solomon Wood: Right. We've also had grants this year from the Local Journalism Initiative.

Colette Watson Great. We are out of time. I wish we could go on. I feel incredibly smarter, having met the four of you. I hope I can reach out to you and pick your brains offline as well. This has been a wonderful experience for me and hopefully the people who joined us today. I thank you all for participating. I thank Carleton for inviting me to join you today. With that, I bid you all adieu.



JOURNALISM IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

THE MANAGER'S PERSPECTIVE

PANEL

Moderator: Brett Popplewell, Carleton University

Speakers: Cheryl McKenzie, APTN; **Michael Melling**, CP24 and CTV News Toronto; **Alison Uncles**, *Maclean's*

Brett Popplewell: My name's Brett Popplewell. I'm a professor at the Carleton School of Journalism and Communication. Thank you for joining us on this panel to discuss the Manager's Perspective, What Longer Term Implications to News Managers See from Journalism and Pandemic Coverage Going Forward, and How Has Journalism Been Changed by the Pandemic? Those are the questions that we've been charged with discussing. With me today are Alison Uncles, Cheryl McKenzie and Michael Melling. I will introduce each of our panellists briefly, and then turn to them to give their opening remarks, after which we will proceed to a response period, where each of you can feed off of what each other has said.

Our first panellist is Alison Uncles, the editor-in-chief of *Maclean's* magazine. Alison joined *Maclean's* in 2014, after 11 years as associate editor for *The Toronto Star*, and five years with the *National Post*, where she served in a number of editorial roles, including national editor, associate editor and managing editor. A graduate of the University of Cambridge and of Queen's University, she joins us from Toronto.

Following Alison, we'll hear from Cheryl McKenzie, who is the executive director of APTN National News and Current Affairs. Cheryl has been with the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network since shortly after its inception in 2001. Working first as a reporter/correspondent, she spent a decade as an on-air host and producer of several of APTN's marquis shows. Prior to her career in journalism, Cheryl pursued a career as a chef. She is a graduate of the University of Winnipeg and joins us from Winnipeg.

Our final panellist today is Michael Melling, general manager of CP24 and CTV News Toronto. Prior to taking on that role he worked as a regional general manager for radio and local TV, and as all regional news director. Michael has been with CTV since 2003, when he joined as a lineup editor and writer. A graduate of Queen's University, Michael has an MBA from Wilfrid Laurier University, and an M.A. in international journalism from Cardiff University. Michael joins us from Toronto as well. I'm going to throw first to Alison, for opening comments on the issues at hand.

Alison Uncles: Thank you so much for inviting me to be on this panel today. It's going to be lots of fun. I was thinking back to anything even remotely similar that I might've covered in my long and kind of old-age career, and I think it goes without saying that none of us have come close to this. We weren't alive during World War II, most of us haven't even reported from a war zone. The closest I came was 9/11. I was a news editor at the time, and I remember as the day progressed that the story seemed impossibly big. One particular string of news alerts was really crushing, and I remember it so well, watching as the number of firefighters dead increased hourly.

At first, we had news alerts about firefighters going to the scene from this precinct and that precinct. Then, when the first tower came down, those firefighters were dead, and hundreds of them the first news alert said. I remember sitting at my desk with my head in my hands, just unbelieving. How could that number be true? It seemed so huge. In preparation for this panel, I checked the number, and it actually ended up being 343 firefighters that lost their lives on that day. That number, at the time, was just overwhelming and unprecedented to me, in my lifetime. And, of course, we now know that 3,000 people died in the towers, and we know that more than 9,000 have died in Canada of this pandemic.

The newsroom where I was working, the *National Post* at the time, was really young, a bunch of upstarts. We had no idea what we were doing, and we certainly didn't know what we were doing on 9/11. We failed pretty spectacularly I think on that day. The front page we put together was very busy, a lot of stories, because we were overwhelmed with the implications of what 9/11 meant, the economic recession that was about to come, and the personal stories, and would the United States retaliate? So it was a very busy front.

And in hindsight, it was one of the least effective fronts produced in the entire world. Because of course what you needed to do was run a big picture, with maybe a word, or one quote, and just pause for a moment as a newspaper to acknowledge the enormity. So, that's a lesson that I drew journalistically from 9/11, when a big thing happens, and that could even be an election, a medium-size thing, I try to look for one thing that we can do that will have impact.

Because the truth is that we all throw everything that we've got at the big story, and we all come out of it with a long list of stories that we've done that we're proud of. And we all try to rise to the moment. But in the end, just like the failed front of 9/11, I feel you need to point to one thing that you're proud of. I feel that for me, and for the organization I'm with. I'll be interested to hear what others think.

So, something that distinguishes you from others on a story, but also something that your newsroom will be remembered for. And usually that's something really hard, and usually that's something super ambitious.

For me, that came quite early on in this pandemic, with a project called "They Were Loved," which is an attempt to document and write obituaries about every single person who died during the pandemic. Its roots lay in a podcast from *The New York Times*, The Daily Podcast, which early on in February they put their health reporter on. He said, "Everybody will know somebody who dies."

We were sitting in the news meeting when our managing editor, Charlie Gillis, mentioned this podcast, and we thought, "That can't be true. Everybody will know somebody who dies? That's just too enormous." In March, my friend texted me to say that her sister had died very, very quickly, and surprisingly, from COVID. So, that was my moment, my personal moment of understanding everybody may well know somebody who died.

The next day I emailed Chris Waddell at Carleton, and he talked with the group of journalism schools about participating in a possible project where students would write obituaries over the course of years. So far, 14 schools have signed up and are participating. We have a seed donation from the Keister Foundation, which has enabled the hiring of a fellow, through Brett, who's our moderator today, and the Future of Journalism Initiative at Carleton. We're so grateful for that port, and for Chris Waddell really taking the lead on this project.

We're hoping over the course of years to write as many obituaries as is possible about people who've died in Canada. So, that's where I feel we've done well so far in our coverage of the pandemic.

Of course, there are areas where we've fallen down. One big one I would say is that early on it was really difficult to figure out how much deference to give to the federal government. They had a ton on their plates, important lifesaving work, and the smaller daily criticisms that were usually further away just seemed wrong.

Every day Trudeau would give his briefing at the front of Rideau Cottage, and our small *Maclean's* team would transcribe it. We'd split up the minutes, transcribe it and post it. We did that as a public service in part, but also it was driving a lot of traffic, because people were keen to hear his reassurance, but he was also announcing policy, making policy announcements from his front porch, and people were wanting to read about it, CERB in particular.

But, those front porch announcements morphed into a self-congratulatory, self-serving thing. We didn't stop our transcriptions soon enough. We didn't realize what was happening soon enough. That's something that I really regret, and that's a balance that I think is extremely difficult to strike in a moment like this, where you're trying to give the government slightly more deference than you would usually, but where does that end and where does the usual job begin?

I also think that at *Maclean's*, and media in general, probably have failed to find the right balance in critiquing our public health officials. *Maclean's* deputy editor, Colin Campbell, mentioned this to me just before the panel, about so many conversations we've had on the extent to which we should be toeing the party line on public health. We were so fearful of writing things that would make this pandemic worse, that the result has been a kind of over deference to those public health officials, particularly on advice, such as wearing masks at the beginning. Which, in hindsight, was awful, and we should've been less forgiving of them in that moment.

So, that's my kind of self-flagellation, the areas where I think we've done well and the areas where we've been challenged and haven't done so well. But I'll be eager to hear what others think, of our performance and their own as well.

Brett Popplewell: Thank you so much. Cheryl, I have you in the lineup next, and then after all three of you have gone, we'll go back over for any comments on each other's comments.

Cheryl McKenzie: That was very interesting. Allison, thank you very much for sharing so much. For me, working in a national television broadcaster primarily, of course we're a multi-platform: digital, our webpage and social media. We have a daily news program, as well as a weekend edition. We do three current affair shows every week, *Face to Face*, *InFocus*, which is a live one hour, *Nation to Nation*, which is our political show. And we have our investigative unit that is running, and our season officially just started at the beginning of October.

But going back to when the pandemic struck, of course this was very new territory for everyone. Especially for me, as I had only been on the job in my executive director role for eight months when the pandemic hit. Right away, APTN, our CEO and our COO just made the commitment that we really wanted to avoid layoffs. That seems to be always a big thing for APTN, is trying to avoid those layoffs that would come with something like a global pandemic. So, how do we do that?

We have the luxury of having a strong IT department, which really made it possible for the majority of us to be able to work from home. Of course, there is that core group that needs to be in our headquarters, they need to be in our bureaus. That's the cameramen, the editors, the technical people, the master control, the broadcast techs, our IT people and a couple of our social media journalists that need to be physically at the bureau.

Other than that, the majority of the people are working from home, and we have the luxury of getting laptops, and we have internet at home. For people that don't have these luxuries, like the people who we're trying to report on, that's been the most particularly difficult obstacle to get around.

As far as our workforce goes, we really had to start adapting the way in which we really want to present our news. With our news reporters and our camera people, everyone has to go out in separate vehicles in the bureau. Anybody who's not working for news, they ought to be working from home, such as the people in programming, in marketing, in other departments at APTN.

Our CEO set out that directive, that news is an essential service, and operations and IT need to be working toward, first, making sure that our signal stays up for the broadcasts, and our digital infrastructure. But we also need to make sure that the news department is equipped to continue producing stories.

I had to make all these different scenarios, where if we lost this person, or if we lost this studio, what would we do? We made a new makeshift control room in our basement in case we had to suddenly close down our main control room and have it disinfected and cleaned up, just to make sure that we could definitely stay on the air.

So it was the leadership higher up, above me, that made it possible for us to have this environment, to keep doing our work and providing that essential service of news. I don't know how others felt, but as far as the attitudes for working from home, that wasn't always something that was encouraged. There was the perception that the person is not going to be delivering as much if they're working from home.

However, we found out that everyone in our newsroom just took to it like fish in water. I keep using that expression, because our content, we thought, was going to go way down, and we would have to resort to a lot of talking heads on the news. Which to some extent we still do, of course, because we have to rely on this means of communication.

But there still was that creativity there, and we still had that going for the accountability stories, in addition to COVID. Once we realized that our newscasts were really about COVID this, and COVID that, and this is so depressing, meanwhile, even before COVID there was a lot of other really pressing subjects that were really serious. We try not to dwell on the negative. We don't want people leaving our newscasts and thinking, "Oh, man, we're in really bad shape." We want to provide balance.

In our reporting about COVID, we're trying to look for those stories so it's not just COVID, COVID, COVID. We started tapping into more people about how they were

dealing with the pandemic. Talking with elders, they talked about going through the Spanish Flu, and how people survived 100 years ago. How whole families were taking off and going out onto the land and staying there for months at a time and being happy doing that.

A part of it was super interesting, just to see more cultural connections that are being made, the cultural survival and the resilience that's happening. Thinking about their ancestors, and how they've lived through previous pandemics and still came through it, and really trying to protect their communities and protect their elders. And knowing that looming threat exists, just because of the living situations in a lot of the communities.

At APTN, I think we've been lucky that we have a very strong infrastructure to support us in the newsroom to keep doing our jobs, and a CEO that believes in news as an essential service. So far, so good.

Brett Popplewell: Thank you for that. Michael, I'll throw it to you now.

Michael Melling: Thanks for the invitation. I'm happy to be here, and happy to take part in the panel. Cheryl, Allison, great to meet both of you. I think I'm going to build a lot on what you guys have just said. In terms of the experience in the newsrooms where I work at CP24 and CTV News Toronto, the last eight months have been a blur. It feels like it's just flown right past. We keep counting the number of months it's been, but it doesn't feel like it's actually been that long. Time has just flown. And it's almost been surreal. I don't think many of us imagined we'd be dealing with a situation like this.

But we are. And I think when I reflect back on it, it almost feels like it crept up on us and we didn't notice it coming. We heard about the coronavirus, COVID-19. I remember sitting in the car with my wife looking at a video of that hospital they were building in China with all the cranes, and they were trying to build a hospital in seven days and saying to her with our kids in the back, "Look what's happening. This is happening over there. Isn't this amazing? What is going on?"

And within a matter of weeks, that NBA game was cancelled in the middle of the game. For me, that was "Oh, this is real, and this is happening." In the back of my mind I always had, "What are we going to do if and when this actually does hit a certain level of scale?" But when that game got cancelled, of all things, that was the one that really sparked it for me to say, "Okay, now it's time to implement some action plans, and things are going to be very different for who knows how long." I think the how long is the thing when it first started.

In Ontario, they extended March break for two weeks. We thought, "Oh, it'll be three weeks. We're going to have to figure this one out, and the kids will all go back to school." Then, after about two weeks you went, "No, this isn't happening." It just kept extending, extending, extending. I think we've all come to the acceptance now that this is our reality for the foreseeable future, more than likely for the next year, until there's a vaccine.

When I reflect on what this meant for our teams, I put it into three buckets. One is the journalistic, one is the operational and one is the emotional. As a leader working through it, I sort of compartmentalized it into those three parts.

The journalistic, this is one of the biggest stories of our lifetime. But this is what we do. We run towards the story, we've got a great team of journalists, and technical support, control room support, digital. You name it, a wonderful team of people. This is why they're in the game — to tell these important stories that are important for people. While there was obviously the stress of covering a major story, it's not that far out of our comfort zone.

The second part though, the operational, was where we started to feel some stress. At the two newsrooms that I run, we had to make some pretty quick decisions, in terms of how we were going to sustain the business and protect it, with a lot of unknowns. The virus was new, we didn't know all the details of how it spread. Alison, as you alluded to earlier, about the health and safety protocols with masks, there were a lot of questions and unknowns, and we had to make some decisions with incomplete information.

What we did here was we separated our teams into inside and outside, and we opened a remote facility for some of our newsroom teams to work out of. Folks weren't travelling in the same vehicles together, we put microphones on the end of hockey sticks, all the stuff that I'm sure you've heard before, and implemented some work-from-home procedures. It took us between three to 10 days to get all of that up and running.

Then the third part of it, which was absolutely the most difficult, was the emotional. I think as leaders, and as a team, you're used to working together in solving problems. When something like this hits, it's the first time I've worked with a group of people where there's an emotional sense in the room, and one of fear. For themselves, for their own personal safety, for that of their friends and their colleagues, and the unknown. There's a natural anxiety around it. And people don't always respond when they're in an anxious state. They often react.

I think for us as a team, that was the biggest challenge, managing some of the reactions, a lot of the questions. And for all of us who work in newsrooms, we know they're full of people who ask questions, and keep asking questions until they get an answer that they're satisfied with. And sometimes when you're managing a situation like this, you just don't have the answer. The answer is, "we're trying our best," or "we're going to have to go back to somebody and get the answer for you." I think for me and the managers I work with, managing the emotions of this pandemic has probably been the biggest challenge we've had.

When I reflect beyond that, in terms of the four biggest take-aways for me, I thought about it and I categorized it into four different parts. The first one I'd say is, the importance of knowledge. In this particular area it would be of science and health-based issues. We really needed to have somebody with a strong functional understanding of health and science who was comfortable keeping on top of the file. Understanding where things were going, so that we could ask the right questions, and as Allison said earlier, be comfortable pushing back, or asking questions from an alternative viewpoint.

I think we did our best with it. For me, it's a take-away that going forward on big stories, you need to make sure you've got a functional expert, or someone, not

necessarily in-house who is ready to go beforehand, but when something like this hits, they've got to be handed the file, and you own it, and you've got to be on point with all the topics.

The second point though, and this follows up on Alison's earlier comment about perhaps an over deference, is the ability to balance points of view and fairness with science, and our duty to public safety. I think it is ingrained in us to present the different angles of all the different stories. But with the pandemic, there were times when there were feelings and conversations within the newsroom about, "This is the direction we're being given by the experts, and we need to sort of temper alternative views.

In hindsight, if you look at what Alison mentioned about masks, that's a great example. Originally, we were told no masks, now we're all being told masks. Well, maybe we could have asked some more questions about that at the beginning. On the other side, if you look at it now with the anti-maskers, we need to balance how much airtime we give them, and make sure we're balancing their point of view with some science as well.

The third point that stuck out for me, and Cheryl raised this as well, is that I'd say it's the Renaissance of public service journalism, and a reminder that we are essential workers, and we're providing a public service. Canadians turned to our organizations in droves. News organizations across the country, their audience is spiked. It's a reminder that we are truly providing value for the audiences. While other areas of media saw drops in their audiences, news maintained or went up. It is a resilient area of content that people want to consume, and I think this is a good reminder of that.

It's also a reminder, that a lot of us, we're privately funded organizations. But at the end of the day, we're providing a public good. I think that's forgotten. People often look to their governments or to NGOs to provide public goods. But even though we're privately funded, we are truly providing a public good with the journalism that we provide.

And then finally, the last take-away on my end, and Cheryl, you alluded to it earlier, was almost a forced acceptance of new ways of working. The working from home, using smart phones for double enders, sitting at a conference like we are today. Not needing to travel. You can get the interview instantly, whether it's having to travel to the other side of town to do an interview, or travel around the country.

I think the audience has accepted what it looks like on TV, shooting an interview on an iPhone. And it does make our jobs easier. I'll admit, as somebody who makes television, it is nice to have a beautifully shot interview. But, sometimes, all the audience wants is something practical, and they want the information. I think it has forced us to accept these new ways of working and it is proof that they do work very well.

Brett Popplewell: Thank you for that. There are a few things I picked up from each of you. And one, Michael, that you just got to at the end and Cheryl, you brought it up as well. I've been thinking about this a lot, how everyone's sort of operating without a newsroom, and every newsroom I've ever worked in is open concept and I never quite

understood why. it was just something that we all accepted, where we're all sort of working on top of each other.

If that disappears, and I take it right now it has, what impact do you think that has on what it means to be a journalist, or to be someone who's supposed to be working in those environments? What is actually lost when those physical spaces disappear?

Cheryl McKenzie: I really miss that environment and just being able to yell across a desk to a colleague, and talking, joking around. But I guess for us, just the things that come up naturally in the conversation, and then end up becoming really critical conversations in your whole newsroom.

Alison Uncles: I would massively agree. We've really missed the fun laughing, joking meetings, where we feed off each other's ideas. Because sometimes, someone will come to a meeting with not a very well-formed idea, but a grain of an idea. In going around the table and building on it, with everybody adding their expertise to it, it ends up being an amazing idea.

That happens sometimes for us in these video calls, but far less frequently than it used to. So, our meetings aren't as fun, and I really miss that. But I would also say we're probably not coming up with the quality of ideas that we used to. Because there's a little bit of magic dust involved in being together and developing an idea, and we haven't managed to figure that out on video yet. Some days we come close, but it's never quite as good.

Michael Melling: I would agree. There is a magic to that face-to-face human interaction that just can't be repeated on the phone or through email or through video chat like this. When you're trying to hash out an editorial decision, if Zoom is freezing up, and you give up on Zoom and hop on a conference call, and you've got six people talking over one another, you can't get those physical cues of who has something to say. It does make communication more difficult. That said, it is what it is, and we just have to deal with it, and I think we're doing our best.

The other side of it though is, I do find, we've been doing quarterly staff meetings for the overall teams. Our teams are on the road in different parts of the city, they're all out and about. To try to coordinate those face to face, historically, has been a nightmare. You're looking at everyone's shifts and schedules, and where they are, and trying to get them back to the station so you could get people in a room.

Instead, what we've been doing is having three or four Zoom calls at a certain time, pick three different appointments, and people can just hop on for an hour, and we can have a check-in as a team. That's actually been a good thing. Before, we never would've thought to do that. We basically had once a year when everyone gets together, and we coordinate a large team meeting. Whereas now we're not afraid to say, "You know what, let's just do three Zoom calls over the course of the week, people just hop on when they can, and we can chat."

This is the week we're doing them at CP24. One of the calls was 15 minutes, and seven people showed up. The other call was 50 minutes, and 27 people showed up. We've got another one on Friday, and the rest of the team might show up. So, there's pros and cons to it.

- Alison Uncles:** I would agree that it's hard to be on top of picking up the cues of how people are feeling. And given that we're probably busier than we have ever been, I find making time or making sure that I touch base with people just to have a chat, rather than a really focused meeting, I fall down on that all over the place, and that's probably more necessary now than it was in the office, where I could just see that somebody was a bit down that day and just check in with them.
- Just to make yourself, as a busy manager, check in with people in a way that just feels a bit forced, whereas it was just so natural in an office setting. I do miss that part too, feeling that I had a better sense of how everybody was feeling.
- Brett Popplewell:** On that, and the notion of what you were saying Alison, about how early on in the coverage there was a bit too much deference being paid to the politicians and to the public health officials. It struck me that so much of the direction that a publication or a broadcast will go in comes from the top. The reporters tell you what they see, but they need to know when to push harder, and go further, and maybe be more questioning.
- I'm curious if that puts a lot of pressure onto the managers to make those calls, at a moment when you don't have the support of the newsroom actually being present around you. And if that perhaps played into this deference, and whether or not now, as we're in the second wave and moving forward, if you're changing your approach now versus back in the spring.
- Alison Uncles:** Well, it's lonely. It's usually lonely, but it's even more lonely now, because you kind of sit here in a basement cell trying to make decisions. I have wondered whether editors and reporters because we're at home with our families, and our work life is so intertwined now with our home life, if that is having an impact on our decision making, and how we treat stories.
- It just so happens that in the last little while, *Maclean's* has done some really gentle, lovely stories. And I wonder, if we were at work every day, with the way we were at work together, if we would be thinking of some slightly harder-edge stories, because we've managed to extricate ourselves from day-to-day life, and we've put our reporter or editor hat on and we're that person. Now we're this one person.
- That might seem pretty existential and weird. I have been wondering if embedding ourselves in our day-to-day life is impacting our judgment at all. I'm not sure if that gets at the answer to your question, but it's definitely something I've been wondering.
- Brett Popplewell:** I think it does. We heard from Dr. Theresa Tam today and others as well talk a lot about fatigue, and we talked about this a little bit here in the comments that have been made, using other terms. Dr. Tam spoke of public fatigue, Jayme Poisson from *Front Burner* spoke about reporter's fatigue. I want to ask each of you about your own fatigue, and newsroom fatigue in general. How fatigued are our media operations, and does that impact the journalism being produced?
- Alison Uncles:** I feel that the newsroom feels energized in a way that, more than ever, we understand the importance of journalism, and get a lot of satisfaction from feeling that you're doing something important. But, definitely the long hours of the first few

months, in our newsroom, had to change. How we were working in March and April couldn't be sustained, and I guess probably much of May as well.

For the summer, we very determinedly scaled back on what we were producing online. Which is a luxury that I wonder if a magazine has, and more news-driven broadcast organizations aren't able to do that. But we did pull back on purpose, just to give people a breath before the second wave hit. So, I would say that we're in okay shape rest wise and feeling energized, but only because we made ourselves take a breath of air for a few months.

Cheryl McKenzie: I'd say for us, there's definitely some people who the pandemic has probably affected a lot more than others, depending on their situation. I can really relate to parents who have kids in school. That's a tremendously stressful situation for them. Early on, when the schools were all closed down, and they're trying to still do their jobs from home while their kids are home, and their partners are at home, and they're struggling. We all know those kinds of stories.

But where the pandemic hits people hard, I find it's been kind of a roller coaster for a lot of people, including myself, some weeks are a lot easier than others, and go through that kind of cycle. We have had a couple people who have needed to go on leave. Not directly because of COVID sickness, but definitely because of how the pandemic has affected them. That means we needed other people to cover off on their job, so they're doing more in order to get our content to air.

The overtime for a lot of our staff has gone way up, and now we're entering a territory where we're going to have to think about buying out some of this over time, which would be a big strain on our budget, because we just can't give them the time off. We also recognize too that we have to give people the time off, so we do encourage people to take a day off here and there. So, it does end up that we'll have more interviews on our newscast instead of having people going out and doing news stories.

I guess it's been a real mix, and one week is different than the next. We just don't know what's going to happen week to week. I'm just very grateful that we have a great team to work with each and every day.

Michael Melling: I'd say my experience has been similar. Is it a fair assessment to say that the team is tired or fatigued? Yes. But they are a great team of people, and they are professionals, and they will always rise to the occasion. I think for each individual, their level of fatigue differs for different reasons. Cheryl, you alluded to that as well. If it's a personal situation, balancing the child-care situations, a sick relative, a family member who might've lost their job or fears losing their business.

A lot of the fatigue comes from outside of the workplace. But for some of our employees, it is from inside the workplace. Some of our senior folks are carrying a heavier load, some of our managers are dealing with the logistics of managing health and safety, and COVID, on top of their day-to-day workload in editorial definitely has its effects.

I took a five-week paternity leave this summer, and when I came back, I walked in and went, "Wow, you guys are tired." It was helpful for me to step back from the

organization for a couple of weeks for a family reason, and then come back in with a fresh perspective and say, “Wow, my guys are tired.” We were very deliberate, similar to Alison and Cheryl, ensuring that everyone took time and kept pushing them to take vacation time over the summer, and said, “Don’t be afraid to pause or park things. They can wait until later.”

But coming back into the workforce after a few weeks away from the building, it was a reminder for me to work with my team to make sure that we’re not pushing them when it’s not necessary to push them, because there’s already enough on their plates.

Brett Popplewell: Michael, I have a question that I’m going to put you on the burner plate for the next second. We’ve heard a lot about how local news outlets have been hit particularly hard by the economic fallout from the pandemic. Ryerson’s April Lindgren recently wrote an article on the policy options headlined, “Local News Is Being Decimated During One of Its Most Important Moments.” And in a panel earlier this afternoon, John Honderich, former publisher of *The Toronto Star* said, and I quote, “This has been quite a catastrophic hit,” and he went on to describe the advertising declines that his former paper has received.

But he also said something really interesting. He said, “On the subscription side, I can tell you the pandemic has been great for business.” He went on to say, “This is really a story in which local, local, local is the key.” One thing that struck me, just as you are the general manager of two of this country’s biggest local news operations, I’m hoping you can tell us what you make of the situation and local news, from what you can see in Toronto and elsewhere, and whether or not that situation is different in the medium that you’re in.

Michael Melling: I can tell you our audiences remain strong. CP24 had its best year ever in the last broadcast year to date. So it tells you the importance of local. People want local news. And CTV Toronto as well has had tremendous performance through the pandemic. It’s clear that local is important to people.

But I think it’s important to remember that the economic pain being felt by newsrooms across the country didn’t start with the pandemic. This has been an issue that’s been going on for a long, long time. We’ve been talking about it for years, probably a decade and a half. The pandemic has made it worse, and just brought it to a boiling point.

Newsrooms are no different than most other businesses being affected by this pandemic. Think of a hairdresser, a restaurant, a car dealership, all of them have had a massive change in their businesses over the last couple of months. And frankly, some of those businesses will make it, and some of them will not. That’s just a matter of business. I referenced earlier what makes news different compared to those other businesses is that it’s a public good, generally being provided by the private sector. I think we often forget that.

So, while we talk about some businesses maybe not making it, there is a public value to what our news organizations are doing. I think it’s a shame that some of these organizations might not make it. Because I think we need a diversity of voice in this country. I think competition is a good thing. I think it makes us stronger as a country and as a democracy.

I think the road forward has a couple of forks in it. One fork is a regulatory or a legal change that will do things like force digital media companies to compensate news organizations for the content that they are promoting on their websites, and that will help ease the pain. That's a conversation that's been taking place before the pandemic started.

The other is, the free market will determine what happens. Some of these operators will close, and others will pave it and adapt to new technologies, and seek ways of controlling costs, and finding other revenues, and they'll live or die by the free market. We'll just have to see what happens.

Brett Popplewell: Thank you for that. Cheryl, I wanted to follow up with you. Because you mentioned earlier the underlying sort of hope back in the spring was to avoid layoffs. APTN is community focused, but also serves communities across the country. I'm curious whether your team has experienced the pandemic differently from Michael's team in Toronto, and how you would describe your network's health at this time, and has that changed over the course of the pandemic?

Cheryl McKenzie: Yes, depending on where in the country journalists are. I certainly don't envy your situation in Toronto, given the numbers, and just how close and dense the population is. Because we have our reporters in places such as Whitehorse and Yellowknife, where they're taking all the precautions for COVID, but we all see how low the numbers are there. We have a couple of reporters that were heading out to Dawson City, and said, "Well, I guess you can travel in the same vehicle." We didn't, not taking some of those same precautions.

Definitely some of them don't have the same kind of stress that we do down south with the fear of COVID infection. But as far as feeling any different, I don't think it's really an issue right now to be too different, other than the variables, the population and the density.

Brett Popplewell: Alison, I have a follow-up for you. My background is print, and I always sort of think of print as products at this point. You have both the digital product and the printed product. Focusing first on the concept of local, there has been quite a bit of emphasis on local at this conference, but that's not your emphasis at *Maclean's*, it's national. So, I was curious if that national general interest focus has shielded *Maclean's* from some of the, quote unquote, decimation at the local news level that we've heard others talk about here.

Alison Uncles: I think the short answer would be yes. I think I take issue with this story being a local story. It can't just be one or the other. It is absolutely national as well, and that's where we kind of work and play at *Maclean's*. We had a story early on by a freelancer that did incredibly well online, very national focus on the lack of national figures being released by the federal government that would reveal whether we were flattening the curve or the curve was getting steeper. Or really the curve at all. The federal government was not releasing those figures. So, she pulled them together herself.

For a few weeks there, she was the person doing that work, and the federal government finally started jumping in too. I'm just stuck on that comment from a little bit ago about how this pandemic is a local story, because I think we've found

lots of places where it has been a very, very national story. So, I think that has gained a lot of traction.

I would also maybe take issue a little bit with the idea of us being a news organization because I think those CP, CBC, and *Globe* stories that are more up and down about an event, local or not, are vulnerable at the moment. But *Maclean's* tries to come at things tangentially, very seldom would we do an up and down news story. We'd try to do an analysis, we'd tried to do a bigger feature about it, we'd try to do an oral history, just play with it a little bit, rather than the more commodified news that is suffering.

I guess the third thing I'd say about local versus national is we have tried here and there to make some inroads and do local stories. We got very excited about the idea of data around the school closings, or schools reopening in September, and we pulled together a post on some local data from across the country, where outbreaks were happening, which schools were having to close, and that kind of thing. It was too big, and people were of course searching for their local school or their city's situation. We ended up backing off that post, because we weren't finding traction with a more national look. People weren't interested in the national look. That was a situation where local was really sought after, and we couldn't deliver. But overall, national keeps playing well for *Maclean's*, for sure.

Brett Popplewell:

I do agree with you. I was echoing John Honderich on the local. I wake up every morning and I go global. I check to see what's happening in Europe, and then assume that we're just two weeks behind, then go national, and then try and figure out where it is in my neighbourhood.

I did have a follow-up question for you, just to do with newsstand, and with the concept that there is still a delivery mechanism to what you're doing, which is the printed product that goes out to subscribers and also to these bricks and mortar stores, that I don't actually know what is happening to them at this moment in time, and whether or not this impacts what your team will potentially be doing beyond the other side of this pandemic.

Alison Uncles:

That has been really interesting, and slightly terrifying, to watch how newsstand sales in particular have played out during the pandemic. At the very outset, we did very well on newsstands. We had a well-timed COVID cover that sold really well. At *Maclean's* we tend to sell quite a lot in grocery stores and drugstores. Those were the stores that were open. Actually, we've seen double digit increases in our newsstand sales in drugstores. So, that's the good news.

In the depth of the lockdown though, we did see a decline on newsstands, and we had to pull back copies that we would usually send. We were sending far fewer out to stores because so many were just closed. There's a period there in the middle where the newsstand sales were really not good, pretty dire. They're jumping again, and we're hoping that we're going to finish the year on par with where we were this time last year.

Some of our magazines within St. Joseph Communications, *Chatelaine* and *Today's Parent* in particular, they send a few copies, a portion of their newsstand sales, to doctor's offices and dentist offices. *Maclean's* doesn't do that almost at all anymore.

Those two prints do. They've pulled back during this time, and the circulation manager tells me that they'll start sending them again when they feel that it's safer. That part doesn't impact *Maclean's* so much.

But subscription wise, we've definitely seen an uptick in subscriptions. Not a massive one, but we do get some feedback through letters to the editor, and a few readers who reach out here and there. There's a portion that are supporting us because of their support for Canadian journalism, and also their extreme interest in the pandemic. But the uptick hasn't been massive. It's basically keeping us even with our decline in newsstand sales over the summer.

That's where we stand paper wise. But paper, surprisingly I think for a lot of us, it really endures. It's a very solid base of print subscribers. I had some conversations recently with some magazine editors in the United States who've launched paywalls lately, in particular *The Atlantic*, and they've really seen some great success in people adding on a print subscription when they sign up for their digital package. At *Maclean's*, we are launching a paywall next year, and we're hoping we'll see an uptick in print subscriptions then too. So, that's the news from the circulation front.

Brett Popplewell: I'd like to go back to something that Michael said about how there was this moment when you remember seeing the cranes building the hospital in China on TV. So again, there was a moment when all of this was starting where I walked into a drug store and I saw pandemic on the cover of *Maclean's*, and I realized, "Oh, I guess I need to start preparing. It's coming. It's on the cover of *Maclean's*, it's here."

We have a question that's come in from the audience. The question is, what do you think the key skills will be for new journalists post pandemic?

Michael Melling: I think the skills post pandemic, will be similar to the ones we were starting to look for aggressively before the pandemic. On the television and broadcast side, it is multi-platform. The expectation now is you're not just a reporter, you're somebody who can shoot video, cut video and from the video do a live hit. I think what the pandemic has proved to us is the viewers are good with unconventional sources of video, interviews off of Skype, and iPhone and Zoom. So, proficiency using those kinds of technology to do your interviews.

Also, an acceptance that that is the reality. I think where we might run into some challenges is thinking that that sort of system isn't good enough, and we shouldn't be using stuff like that. Basically trying to fight the new technology. I think it's important to accept it and adapt to it and use it as a tool in your kit.

Cheryl McKenzie: For APTN, yes, definitely Michael, absolutely. Those reporters that can do it all. And it's a tremendously tough job, being a VJ. We used to use the big broadcast camera. We have smaller ones available, but we find the more experienced camera people really prefer those Sony XD 400s, or whichever generation we're on now. So yes, the ability to have those skills to be able to front, VJ, edit, write your story.

But I think the biggest thing that I've seen where people have success is being a good writer and being able to adapt your style for the different platforms. I find they are the strongest journalists that we have.

Alison Uncles: It's interesting for me to hear you both on this question, because we're so much less technologically based at *Maclean's*. I'm really struggling and I'm so glad you both answered the question before I had to jump in. I'm struggling with anything that's changed *MacLean's* wise, magazine writing wise, before and after the pandemic. Because I think I'd still be looking for somebody who has a deep curiosity, ambition for a story, who's very passionate. Who writes, who can really write, with a capital W.

Also, this was true before the pandemic, and I think it's still true, maybe it's even more true, that we don't like working with people who aren't nice. We're a small team, and we have to all row in the same direction. So, being a good team player, who's a good part of a team, and team spirited, and happy to help other people, and to celebrate their successes, and cheer for them, and want your colleagues to do well, and your colleagues will want you to do well, that's the kind of person who fits in our team.

But that's not different from what was true before the pandemic. It's possibly slightly more true, because we feel it's us against the world at the moment, with so much work and such a massive story to tell. But those central tenants, I guess, of what we'd look for are unchanged.

Brett Popplewell: Speaking of the central tenants of what you look for, has it changed on the stories at this point? For the stories beyond the pandemic, is the bar higher or different? Are there certain things that you would've done pre-pandemic, the stories that would be told, that you think it's time to get back to, or realize that you have been omitting?

Alison Uncles: I can totally jump in on that. Because again, we fell down, I fell down at the beginning of the pandemic. Because if you look through the first few editions after the pandemic was declared, basically our entire print edition was either COVID or racism in the summer. Sometimes both of those things. And they were very, very heavy editions, and massive stories that needed to be told at length and with lots of ambition, no questions. But there was no room for anything else.

We have recently been asking ourselves as we look at the page laydowns, "Where is the joy here? Where is the wonder?" So we're really making ourselves look for those stories again. Because we miss them personally, and also because a magazine isn't really a magazine if it's only ever about one thing always. But we have to be deliberate about it, because otherwise we will gravitate back to only writing about the two big stories happening in the country at the moment.

Michael Melling: I'm not really sure we would look at changing anything editorially in terms of the story selection. I think we'll continue to follow the nose, and keep the customer first, the viewer first, in terms of what we think is of interest to them. I think what it has reinforced though is the importance of sticking to our principles and our policies as a news organization and as journalists.

I think through the pandemic and politically over the last couple of months, we have seen an increase in fake news, with regards to stuff floating around, with regards to the pandemic, health information. I think it's very important for us to continue to remind ourselves of our principles, and the importance of those principles, for accuracy, fairness, trust and balance, and stick to them. And for our journalists not to be giving their opinions. Just to make sure we stick to what we're supposed to be

doing, to ensure we differentiate ourselves clearly from some of the fake news that I think has bubbled up a lot more over the last couple of months.

Cheryl McKenzie: True. Not really a big change, but just thinking about the people that are left out of the national dialogue, because they don't have a computer, they don't have internet access, and we don't have as much of an ability to travel into a lot of the communities. So, I guess we're just trying to think about making sure that we're reaching all those communities that we could before the pandemic and trying to figure out how we can do that and keep serving the people who are not being heard.

Brett Popplewell: I have a couple questions that I want to pose, just looking really to the future now, and what your newsrooms will look like. Do you think that they'll ever look like they did before the pandemic? Has this really reshaped everything? Or do you for see operations getting back really to looking and operating as they did before?

Michael Melling: I think the onus is on us. If we look at pre-pandemic as the good old days, and we look at today as the days we're living now, I think the onus is on us to invent what's next and take the best parts of the good old days and the best parts of what we've learned from the pandemic and carve out what the next chapter looks like.

If we look at some of the technology we've used, the working from home, there are some advantages to that. I think the onus is on us to be deliberate and pick the best parts of pre-and post-pandemic, or pre and pandemic, to build out post-pandemic realities for our newsrooms.

Cheryl McKenzie: I think that we're still going to keep a little bit of a mix of allowing people to work from home. Because at first, it seemed difficult as everyone was distracted by the pandemic, and the numbers were going up, and you're trying to work at home with all of these distractions. Then after a while, after working from home for quite a while and then going into the office a couple days a week, I found that, "Wow, I'm even more distracted when I'm in the office, and talking to people, and watching the feeds come in, and seeing the live production." And I found, "I'm way more productive if I could just stay at home and keep working."

So, definitely benefiting from experiencing both, and I think there will continue to be a better balance of work and home life. Maybe that will keep our workforce even younger. Because we all know that's the kind of life. We all hear about Millennials, and I don't know if anyone is listening on this webinar here and can relate. Because we talked about younger people wanting this life balance more, about working at home. I don't know if this is part of what was in mind, but we'll definitely be keeping a bit of both worlds.

Alison Uncles: I massively agree with that. This question is really funny for me, because when you ask will our newsroom look the same, I think you said, we moved our newsroom in the middle of this. We were sold, and we had to leave the place where we had been for years, so all of our stuff is in boxes, and we're waiting for where we land. So that's exciting in a way, because we can build whatever that ends up being. But I do imagine that's going to be a hybrid of story meetings, at work, and way more at home, working from home for reporters in particular I imagine.

Brett Popplewell: I want to thank each of you for doing this, for giving the time to us, to the students and others who gathered here today. It's very much appreciated to get your insights. I think that often the media, being what it is, we get to know the reporters, we get to know the people on camera, and writing the big stories, and we often don't get to see the people who are actually keeping these things alive. It's been nice to hear some of your perspectives today.



JOURNALISM IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

OPENING NIGHT FORUM

Moderator: Amanda Connolly, Global Television
Speakers: André Picard, *The Globe and Mail*; Tom Rosenstiel, American Press Institute

Amanda Connolly: Welcome to everyone. This is going to be a very interesting conversation, so thank you so much for joining us here tonight. My name is Amanda Connolly. I'm a political reporter with Global News and I will be moderating the conversation tonight. We've got two fantastic guests with us here. First of all, we have André Picard, who is the health reporter and columnist with *The Globe and Mail* newspaper here in Canada. We also have Tom Rosenstiel, who is the executive director of the American Press Institute and founder for the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism. Welcome to you both. Thank you, of course, to Allan Thompson as well at Carleton University School of Journalism for having us. We're going to have a great conversation, so I want to start off by giving an overview.

Our goal tonight really is to have a broad conversation about the way that the coronavirus pandemic and the crisis that we're all in right now has been affecting the work that we all do as journalists — both journalists individually as well as the industry itself. I want to start it off tonight and give each of our panellists a chance to share their thoughts about what is the most profound impact that you are seeing on the industry and on journalists individually, as well as newsrooms, which are having to adapt to the coronavirus crisis. Tom, why don't we start with you and then we can go over to André.

Tom Rosenstiel: Thanks, Amanda. I think there are three things that I would cite as the real impacts of the pandemic on journalism. The first one is economic and concerns the structural problems that have been facing journalism, which is really the decline of the advertising model. All of those structural problems accelerated. In the United States, for instance, about half of the advertising newspapers had in January vanished with the pandemic. And that advertising base was already dramatically withered from what it was 15 years ago. So, all of these economic pressures accelerated. That has led to publications trying to accelerate adoption of the internet. A major issue for a lot of publications that have print is that their print readers never registered to actually use their product digitally. The future of journalism, at least in the United States, is to get to a print-less future. For seven-day-a week papers, for daily papers, that may mean a Sunday print product, but all the other days really need to become digital.

And they need their revenue base to be subscription. *The New York Times* is already there basically. They are close to having 70 percent of their revenue now being from subscriptions. The question, really, in the United States is can local media get to a point where there are a sufficient number of subscribers for them to be sustainable? But to be sustainable they really have to get rid of print because half of the cost of any print publication, but particularly a daily newspaper, half of those costs are caught up in print and delivery. If you can eliminate those costs you can be sustainable with about 60 percent of the revenue you once had. The second big impact in the United States is that it has made journalism more local again. One of the phenomena that I observed in 16 years of writing media research with the Pew Research Center was that interest in local news gradually declined as access to the internet grew.

Thirty years ago, 20 years ago, that was the area that people had the most interest in, which came through in survey after survey. Local television was the most popular medium in the United States and as people had access digitally to news from

around the world, and particularly to national publications, interest in local news gradually declined. We saw it in the data, survey after survey. It also nationalized our politics. There was an old saying in American politics that all politics is local. That's no longer true. Access to national information, which was more dramatic, and more interesting, and through social and through other digital platforms. Because of the way that the United States has dealt with the coronavirus information locally is really how you're going to survive. Are there mask rules here? Can I go to restaurants? How do I get tested? All of that information is local because we don't have a coherent national response. And interest in local publications has spiked up.

As part of that, what people have discovered in newsrooms is that there are two levels of information that people are engaging with most. One is really basic information, what we would call service journalism. How do I do this? How do I vote? Who's running? How do I get tested for coronavirus? And the other is the highest level of information, synthesized in a very large way, often with a lot of interpretation and a lot of context, what's really going on. It's that middle where we have done a lot of journalism in our careers that the data shows people are not that interested. As we've seen in this rise in localism again, or renewal of localism, we've seen the sense that really basic, essential information, often very visual, made very easy to share has worked really well along with the deepest kind of reporting. And the third impact I would say is a reckoning that's going on in American newsrooms over race, over trust and what we call default culture in newsrooms.

I will say this, that Bill Kovach, who's a great friend of mine was the editor of *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, ran the Nieman Fellowship at Harvard, was *The New York Times* Bureau Chief in Washington, DC, for many years and the co-author of several books with me. Bill always said that every generation invents its own journalism. And we've seen that is true if you look back. Journalism shifts with changes in the socioeconomic status of a country. Bill was part of a generational shift in the early 1960s with the Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam and Watergate. I was part of another generation that was a more interpretive style of journalism. These shifts in journalism do not happen gradually, they come in fits and starts. And when a new generation takes over, gradually that hardens and becomes a new default culture. So that's where we are today. The fall culture in most newsrooms is white, it's liberal, more liberal than it used to be, and there's data to support that, and it's older.

It always is older. It's not as male as it once was, though it's still male dominated in the United States and the reckoning that we're seeing over objectivity and what language we use to describe a political line or other behaviour that people want to call out. We're going to have to deal with this and sort through it. We're in the middle of that or maybe we're at the beginning of that. And there are two forces that are colliding there; one is generational, but the other is that in the United States our mainstream press has really lost the trust of conservatives. We're at a point now, and this is new Gallup data that came out two weeks ago, 73 percent of Democrats trust the media, 40 percent of registered independents say they trust the media, only 10 percent of Republicans. While we're going through this reckoning in newsrooms about how subjective to be or how to approach reporting, that's colliding with the fact that if journalism cannot recapture the trust of a large portion of the country that it really fails at its essential function.

The essential function of journalism is to create a public square and a common set of facts. And if we can't do that, it's hard to see how democratic republics survive.

Amanda Connolly: You raise a lot of good points there. The sharing of common facts. I want to go over to you, André, as well, because of course you're covering this firsthand from a health reporter perspective, health columnist. I imagine you see a lot of this differing opinion around what some would consider to be common facts. What are you seeing as the biggest effects and changes in the industry right now and the challenges, too, for journalists?

André Picard: I think there are a few. I don't want to be too repetitive in terms of what Tom has said. He hit on all the big ones, but just to build on that I think to me what's really striking is this paradox. Our papers, our media are more popular than ever. People really want information about the pandemic, but we've never had less revenue. What advertising we had has dried up. Papers like *The Globe and Mail* are doing a little better because we have paywalls, but none of the COVID coverage is paywalled. So we're giving away our most popular product. It's this weird paradox and it's unsustainable obviously. We have to figure out how long that can go on, but it's weird to have more readers than ever and feel like your job is more precarious than it's ever been. I think that's the reality for a lot of journalists. I think what Tom said is very important about what readers are interested in. We found there's this real appetite for service journalism. Just wanting basic facts. Can I wear a mask here? Do I have to wear it there?

It's hard to do that in a country like Canada where it's really decentralized, where we have these 14 jurisdictions as a national paper. There's nothing that makes me tear my hair out more than what's happening in these four provinces that I haven't been following too closely. That's why I have no hair left, it's because of this tearing out my hair trying to figure out the rules in different jurisdictions. But people really want that, so we have to provide it. What they also want, and Tom mentioned this too, is the other end of the spectrum. They want opinion. I'm an opinion columnist. I write opinion pieces about the pandemic and I take positions. Damn it, we should have Halloween. And that infuriates half my audience, and it makes the other half really happy, but they want that. They want to be challenged; they want to know what they should think about this.

Even if I'm going to disagree with you, I want to know. So that's a different shift and that's new for us in health care. In health care, we're much more on the one hand, on the other hand. And that's changed a lot with the pandemic. I think the situation with the local media is very different in the United States and Canada. In Canada I think, sadly, our local media is dying really, really quickly. It's owned by a very small number of chains and a lot of towns don't have papers anymore. We've seen hundreds of papers disappear in the few months of the pandemic. They were already teetering, and it's just pushed them over the edge. And I think that's really, really troubling going forward. We're going to have to figure out how to do local news. The other thing, and this is, again, a more personal view, I think health and science journalism has become very popular and really desired by the public. Again, operated on the margins. We had a good readership, but obsessives that followed us, and now it's much more for the public.

I also think it reminds us how do we sustain beats? How do we have specialized reporters going forward? And the last one I'll mention, because I think it's very important, Black Lives Matter has not just had an impact in the United States, but it's had a big impact in Canada, challenging the diversity of our newsrooms. We know and we've known for a long time that our newsrooms don't reflect our population and our readership. Again, we have this struggle. How do we hire new people when we're losing revenue and when we're throwing employees overboard? I think there's a real desire to have people who don't look like me in the newsroom, old white men, but how do you get them in there? And I think that's a real challenge. And in Canada it's as much as the Black Lives Matter, I think Indigenous Lives Matter is even more important, more at the forefront, because its reconciliation is more top of mind.

How do we get our indigenous reporters and their voices into the newsroom? And I think we'd all love to do it yesterday, but how is it going to happen practically? You've got to pay people, monetize that. There are real challenges in the business.

Amanda Connolly: I want to touch on that. To follow up on what you were saying about the diversity in the newsrooms, also the impact on local news because I know with local news in particular, it's a very common starting ground. I know I got my start in local news, a lot of my colleagues have done the same thing. You move around, you start off small, you work up from there. And with those avenues closing, I wonder what your thoughts are on how we ensure that we're getting people into the industry who don't just come from the backgrounds where you can afford to go and do a one-month unpaid internship in New York, or Toronto, or somewhere else.

How do you maintain that diversity when the opportunities that are important to fostering that are slowly drying up?

Tom Rosenstiel: I was just looking at this data for something I was working on. In 1973, 4 percent of people who worked in American newsrooms across all media, 3.9 percent were black. And in 2013 the number was 4.1 percent. So, after 40 years of some effort to try and change this, no progress had been made. And I would venture, without knowing for sure, that since 2013 those numbers have probably decreased. The experience that I hear from folks of colour is that they go into a newsroom and they are expected to think like everybody else in there. And there isn't a real culture of open debate and there's an uneasiness, which is tragic, about how much does your personal experience inform your reporting. In the work that I've done, put it this way, if you think of objectivity not as neutrality, but as an approach to understanding the world, a method of verification, a method of reporting, which was the original intent when the concept of objectivity migrated from social science in the 1920s into journalism. It was a call for a more scientific spirit in reporting.

To do that, you actually start with what is my initial reaction or my initial point of view. There is lots of writing about this in the academic literature where you don't deny that you have an a priori point of view, you start with that and then try and expand beyond that. If you took that approach, that method, you would have newsrooms that were more open, where people would actively debate what's the approach to this story. It's hard to do when you're in a breaking news story, of course, but our newsrooms tend to be places where we don't want to debate these things. There's a pretense that the objective method means we're blank slates.

That's a great fallacy and failure of the way we approach this, but I think it makes newsrooms less hospitable. I also think that when we talk about diversity the point of it is not that we look like the communities that we cover, it's that we understand the communities that we cover.

To do that, you need to think like the communities that you cover. Therefore, hiring diversity is an essential first step, but it is not the end. You then have to create a culture where people can really argue, debate, bring their personal points of view to the creation of news, not to the end product. These are subtle things and the way we teach journalism generally is an apprenticeship model, where we don't really talk about this stuff because it's pretty high level. And I think that has frustrated our efforts at diversity over two generations or longer. I worked for many years at the *LA Times* and their first reckoning with race came during the Watts Riots in the mid 1960s. And here we are almost 70 years later and we're not a heck of a lot further along.

Amanda Connolly: André, what are you seeing on that front in terms of that agreement about a shared set of facts? We heard early on in the Trump presidency a lot of talk about these alternative facts, about this realization growing in a lot of newsrooms that people don't necessarily share the same baseline understanding or acceptance of the world. So how do you personally go about trying to make your work as accessible as possible and confront that new and challenging reality that there is a much broader range of people who don't trust the elites, and the science, and things such as that these days?

André Picard: I think you have to recognize it's out there. I think it's a little easier for those of us who write about health and science because they're facts. There aren't alternative facts. There are alternative opinions, but science isn't an opinion. It's factual, whether you like it or not. I think we have a real challenge dealing with this information, people who just say, "Well, that's not true," even if it is. "The Earth is flat" kind of thing, vaccines don't work. I think we just have to constantly confront that, and we also have to realize that when you get right down to it, it's fairly marginal. These are people with loud megaphones, but they're not in large numbers. We have to be careful not to overstate the power and the breadth of this. I think it is far worse in the United States because everything there is polarized politically.

Tom Rosenstiel: Everything is worse?

André Picard: A little bit easier in Canada, but it's creeping over the border. It's oozing over in some quarters, so we have to be careful about that. I think you just have to be as precise as possible, as factual as possible, and hope that works. I think it's going to get more difficult as we go along. Your previous question I think is an important one too. I don't think we operate any longer where you start in your small town, and you work your way up the ladder. That has gone out the window long ago. When I look at our summer students that we hire, they come from all kinds of backgrounds and they're very entrepreneurial. There are lots of freelancers, lots of people who work in PR, they come back and forth. It makes a different model where you're selling yourself. It's almost like you're this company and you're trying to find out where you're selling your product. And your product is you, so the voice is becoming more important.

Which is really the antithesis of when I went to journalism school, which was you have no voice, you're invisible. It's just the facts. That changed with me because I

became an opinion columnist, but I think that objectivity nonsense has thankfully gone out the window long ago. When I speak to journalism students now, I say it's about fairness. You try and present things in a way that's fair. Never mind objectivity, that doesn't exist.

Amanda Connolly: Do you think that the presence of a lot of journalism students, and not even students, folks who are starting out and looking to get their feet in the industry, whether it's through school or not, the accessibility of them as you're talking about the branding, the voice in that, and the ability to share that online can be, in a sense, if not an equalizer, making up the difference for some of the opportunities that you lose when local media shuts down to make sure that some voices that perhaps wouldn't necessarily get through the door can still be heard and can be given more credence and weight in the work that we do.

André Picard: Yes, I think you almost have to find a niche. It's all about finding a niche, finding your voice to get seen. Social media has helped people get seen. We especially want people from different communities, that's where we go looking. We go looking for blogs. Send us an opinion piece, that's how we're going to get those varied voices in the paper, at least until we can change our newsrooms. Which, as I said before, I don't know exactly how that's going to happen.

Amanda Connolly: We've got a question here for Tom from one of the participants. What are the implications for newsrooms of the future and the skills needed by future journalists if the two focuses of service journalism and very long-form features are maintained in a post-COVID world?

Tom Rosenstiel: I think that our newsrooms used to be very simple organisms. We had writers and former writers who we called editors. And then there were a few photographers who didn't dress well, and we had some graphic artists. Television was a little more complex. You had more skill sets, but these organizations are now much more complicated organisms. We've got producers, developers and engagement editors, and data people, data scientists, and all of them intersecting with the newsroom, whether in the newsroom or not. The skill sets that we need are much more complicated. If you are a news organization, whether you're in radio, television or video, those distinctions by medium don't exist in the same way. *The New York Times* is a video operation and an audio operation, a podcast producer and a text producer, the visual graphics, all of that. And that is the future of any organization to the extent that it's capable of doing so. At the same time, there is a need for information in real-time and this need for information that is "sense making" journalism at the higher level.

There are more stories in *The New York Times* today that read like a *New Yorker* story than there were 30 or 40 years ago. There's also more breaking news than there was, even in the days when *The New York Times* was producing four or five editions in a day. I check *The New York Times*, the last data I read was that people who get news on their phones will check their phones over 100 times a day. If you are a news consumer, you're checking for live updates. And you appreciate the technology that says that story is grayed out because you've already read it, because you don't want to be duplicating your activity. We actually have to be operating, to answer this question, where we're teaching people how to do news very quickly and accurately.

Which is like playing Mozart without making mistakes and then teach people how to compose their own concertos by doing this in-depth journalism. As André said, the training system that we used to use isn't really there. There is a lot more education outside the newsroom, however, than there ever used to be.

You can go to conferences and get training, and do online training, and the sophistication because of the entrepreneurial approach that André spoke about, the fact that people say not that they want to get to that place, but they think as they begin their careers that they want to know these skills. I think they're picking them up more on their own and less through the osmosis of the teaching at an institution than they ever did. But if you are a young person entering journalism, you need to be very intentional about that. And if you think I just want to write long-form magazine stories, you are not going to make it because that's just insufficient. It may be your fantasy, but you've got to be able to do a lot more things than that.

Amanda Connolly: That feeds into the next question from one other participant, and I think I'll open this up to both of you. André, you can go first, and we'll come back to Tom because I do want to get both of your thoughts on this. Pat Rich is asking, "have the basic skills required to be a journalist changed? Getting a story by asking people what they know, putting all of that together in a compelling way." André, maybe you can start it off. How have the requirements and the skills of, again, being a journalist changed because of the pandemic right now, but also the broader shifts that we're seeing in the industry with technology and the different demands for the type of journalism that we're doing?

André Picard: That's an interesting question. I think the same basic skills are needed. It's about storytelling, gathering information synthesizing it, making it understandable, digestible for the public. That has not changed. What's changed I think is you have to do it so much more quickly. You have to do it in different ways. I don't want to date myself, but I started before laptops, cell phones and the internet. It was much simpler then. We walked into the newsroom and we wrote long stories. And that's very different, but I still do the same thing today. I talk to people, I gather information, I synthesize it, but it's just the speed and where it ends up. Sometimes I'll be doing a blog or I'll do an Instagram Live or an opinion piece or a service piece. I answer lots of Q&A during the coronavirus because of this desire for information. It is so many more forms, but I think the basics are still pretty much the same. And then there's all this new stuff that, I'll admit, I have no idea what it is.

I know we hire lots of people to do coding and I hope I never know what that is because I don't want to know.

Amanda Connolly: It's quite fun, I have to say. Tom, why don't you go ahead?

Tom Rosenstiel: I think that some of this has actually made us better, a lot of this has made us better. Yes, we have to go faster, and speed is the enemy of accuracy. And the goal of journalism is to get it right. Ultimately in books that I've written, like *The Elements of Journalism*, we say the first principle of journalism is accuracy, tell the truth. All of the techniques that we use are in service of that, but I think the fact that we have to do all of these things and be on all of these platforms has clarified something for us, which is that the purpose of journalism was not to write stories, print them on paper

and have people read them the next day. The purpose of journalism is to provide people with information so they can be self-governing. And it's a service as much or more than it's a product. The fact that we have to serve people in these multiple ways has clarified that.

We also have the ability to learn things much more quickly than do this story now. I had to pick up the phone when André and I started out. You had to pick up the phone, find people to call, go to the library and get the clips. All of that took a lot more time. There was a big library and you would go get the clips. Then you would read them and that would take 45 minutes. Your ability to reach people to get their information and our ability to have an accurate accounting of things is so much faster now. We have so much access to data. And I don't just mean people sending their talking points to us via the computer instead of having to actually call them. It comes to us. The fact is that if I want to know something, I don't have to call an expert up and ask him. I can look up the data myself. So our journalism is more empirical and potentially is more factual.

Which mitigates the fact that we have to do it faster. Yes, we have to reach people in many more ways and it's not fair to ask André to be conversant in every platform. We all need help at that. Back in the day, when you worked on small publications and you had to be your own photographer, if you were a bad photographer, you were a bad photographer and you were a good writer. We want to even that out. We don't want to make everybody into a backpack journalist if they're not capable of it, but we do need to provide backpack journalism to the audience.

André Picard: I want to add I'm not one who romanticizes this. I don't miss going to the library one iota. I love social media. I live on Twitter. Overall, I think it's far better now. There are challenges, they're just different. I also like the self-correcting nature. I find journalism is more like science now. I could post something online, a "clicky" story, and then somebody will say, "In the third paragraph she said four people and it was three." And before it gets into print the next day that's corrected rather than waiting, making the mistake, the correction gets printed two days later.

Tom Rosenstiel: Yes, the web is not a self-cleaning oven quite the way the optimists thought, but you're right. It's the small things that we get wrong that are corrected very quickly.

Amanda Connolly: I know from my own experience, too, working in politics, it is a very useful tool. Obviously you want to use things like Twitter in moderation because it can be a lot, but particularly when you're trying to verify details or little things that someone else who saw it can chime in if they think that you got something wrong. And you can have it as a tool to re-evaluate what you're looking at or get more information more quickly as well sometimes, too. There are definitely pros and cons to that as well as with all things. So that segues into one other question How do you assess the relative influence on public opinion of traditional journalism versus social media? I'm thinking they're probably getting at, again, aspects of that impartiality and neutrality debate, and how our understanding of that has evolved overtime.

Plus, this pressure on journalists to also be, in a sense, brands online and personalities online that go beyond what they might normally have done 10 years ago.

Tom Rosenstiel: I think it's useful to think that our media ecosystem is made up of reportorial media, which is more traditional, and then the cacophony of opinion that's out there. Not opinion journalism, like André does, but I mean just people offering their opinion. In the United States at least, when folks are trying to pass along misinformation or disinformation or conspiracy theories, we have a few of those in the US these days, their goal is to get this to migrate into traditional press, to normalize these conspiracy theories, to take notice of a deep fake or an outlandish thing. It's very important to Trump, for instance, that his tweets be amplified by traditional media, that they get noticed. And there are a couple of reasons for that. One is that what's in the traditional media feeds, what goes into social media and what's commented on has to have something to comment on.

In our first presidential debate, the president was asked about Proud Boys, which is a right-wing neo fascist group in the United States, and he said stand back and stand by, not stand down. He was asked would you tell them to stand down and he didn't. He said stand back and stand by. For the Proud Boys, this was their greatest day in the history of that neo-fascist movement because they had been normalized by a leader in mainstream media. The data's pretty clear that social media now rivals television, and among young people surpasses it. By younger I mean anybody under 40. The grist that feeds that mill, it still comes from the reportorial press.

Amanda Connolly: André, what do you think of that?

André Picard: I think you're quite right. The people who send me the most hate mail on social media are the ones who most desperately want to be in the newspaper. There's this irony there that's pretty profound. I think that the lines for me blur increasingly. I use social media, I use Twitter, that's my newsfeed now. I used to come into the office, and I had a stack of 10 newspapers that I'd leaf through. And now I get on Twitter, and I look at my trusted sources, and that's how I read the news. I like that. For me I have quite a presence on social media. I have lots of Twitter followers and I write the same things that I write in the newspaper, but in a more pithy, shorter version. And I always link to things, so I don't do freestanding opinion pieces on Twitter. It's always me linking to something else whether I agree with it or not.

And I believe in, I'm old fashioned in this way, the sharing of opinions even if I don't agree with them, this liberal notion of sharing things. And that's changing too, and that's something I have to adjust to.

Tom Rosenstiel: Amanda, there's one thing I would add to this, which is probably worth noting. When we think of the traditional press in the old concept, the metaphor was the press is a gatekeeper over what the public knew. Today we are much more of an annotator of what they have already heard. We're not their first reference. They are not seeing it on television at six o'clock in the evening. So that makes the mandate that the press call "balls and strikes," and say something is not true and not be just a stenographer, more important. But we have to recognize that we are annotating things after they are already public. The president tweets and then we are contextualizing those tweets.

Amanda Connolly: So how much of a component is that fact checking aspect there? We see a lot of that with Donald Trump in the United States. We certainly do this in Canada as

well. Where is the role for journalism in there? And coming back to what you all mentioned earlier in the conversation around trust and around public trust in journalism, in scientists. How do you balance that out and where is the way forward through that when there is such a need to be doing this kind of work right now?

André Picard: I think that fact checking has become very important. Daniel Dale has made a career of this, and done really interesting jobs, and others are copying him now. We have to do that. We do a lot of that in health and science, things like hydroxychloroquine. I have to write a column to say it doesn't matter how many times you say it works, it doesn't work. So that's a lot of it. It's not just fact checking but bringing back the clock where it's supposed to be, to the right time. That's a lot of what we have to do; help people sort through all this noise to say, "No, actually this is what the facts say, and this is what the research says. It's not what President Trump said." I think that's very important. Whether it has an influence or whether the noise dominates, I don't know. You'll have to ask me whether it's a good day or a bad day. On a bad day I think they just pay attention to the noise.

Tom Rosenstiel: There's a growing body of research on fact checking because it's a relatively new movement. Not as new as people think, but it dates back to the early 1990s and then had a rebirth in the United States with PolitiFact in 2007. We've learned a few things: one is that we're more aware of confirmation bias. Not a new term, not a new concept. Walter Lippmann wrote about it in the 1920s, but we're more aware of how that influences fact checking. People like it when the other guy gets fact checked and not their guy. We also know that repetition has an impact. There are studies that show that if you repeat things over and over people will believe things even if they know they're not true.

I think fact checking probably needs to evolve away from the idea that I'm fact checking a politician's statement and more around the things that André was talking about, where we ask does hydroxychloroquine work or not? Where we're fact checking issues for people and not just fact checking a statement by a political actor. Fact checking, in other words, needs to grow out of its adolescence I think.

Amanda Connolly: And where do you envision that going? How do you see that as we look away from that immediate crisis emergency moment of the pandemic? We're into the mid-term, long-haul stretch of this. How do you look at what we've seen so far draw those lessons from it and envision the best way forward to keep doing our jobs and do them in ways that will fill the gaps that we've identified so far?

André Picard: I think our coverage of the pandemic is going the way the profession is going, which is people want more analysis and they want more opinion. They want more synthesis and what we hear from our readers now is we don't want as many COVID stories. We're sick of COVID stories. We want us to tell you what we should care about today, and more importantly, what should we care about tomorrow? I think that's the future of journalism more generally. We can get the Gaines-Burger of news online instantly for free and you can get that anywhere, but it's harder to get the analysis and the context for it. I think that's really our future. And hopefully people are willing to pay for that extra bit of legwork and information.

Tom Rosenstiel: I would add that I think that fact checking becomes something that is not segregated out just in fact checks with meters, and that it can be synthesized into other stories

and other things. I think you're seeing that in the pandemic. I actually believe that Trump has actually made journalists better in the United States. We are more transparent, we are more epistemological, to use a fancy word. We do more to show the evidence to back up what we're saying. And the other thing I would say, and this is a hobby horse of mine, I think we need to move toward with what I call issue-centric fact checking, which was where we fact check concepts and ideas for people and not, as I said before, just statements by actors. I mean, it's a crummy term because all journalism should involve fact checking, but it refers to this particular thing where instead of being a colour commentator in the booth, we are referees on the field throwing flags and influencing the game more directly, or at least trying to.

And we think that's okay. It's a more assertive kind of journalism in the way that André was talking about.

André Picard: Tom, I think we always struggle when things are untrue whether it is better to try and debunk them or is it better to ignore them? I think that's one I struggle with every day.

Tom Rosenstiel: Yes. There's a whole concept now in the United States and we have it in Canada, but we've got a bigger problem at the moment, which is the concept called strategic amplification. That is the hinge moment and the criteria that you use to decide to knock something down that you think is untrue. It's a very complicated thing, and it's going to vary, and people are going to make different judgment calls about it, but probably the best example that we have studied was a fake video of the speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, that was manipulated and slowed down to make her appear to be drunk. And *The Washington Post* waited several days to do a story and was quite mindful about this notion that André's raising about what's the point at which you decide we need to knock this down. And there are scholars such as Dana Boyd and others who say you should wait until you know that this has become significant.

At *The Post*, the Pelosi video actually got a lot more viewers after they did their story, but the evidence would suggest that most of those newer viewers, that virality that they created, was people being aware that it was a fake. Therefore, it wasn't people spreading it and being confused. It was people being shocked and outraged that this deep fake had been perpetrated. Even when we analyze what's the right time to do it, there's just no easy answer, but I think you have to be mindful. You can't be playing whack-a-mole; you have to decide certain targets are real and other targets are trivial.

Amanda Connolly: It seems that we saw that NPR put out a statement from their public editor talking about why they had not covered the Hunter Biden story out of the *New York Post*, saying, "Look, we have determined that this is not worth our time to be covering. And you're going to see us taking a stance in making those calls throughout the final bit of the election. "What do you think of seeing more news outlets and more journalists, editors, taking that stance, and saying clearly this does not meet our boundary for coverage?"

Tom Rosenstiel: There's been a lot of push-back from scholars and others about this in the last year and a half in the United States and there's more awareness of it. The newest wrinkle is we have QAnon supporters. QAnon is this conspiracy theory that there's a network

of Satanist pedophiles embedded deeply in the US government. And there's actually some candidates who are QAnon followers who have won primaries and could potentially be members of Congress if they win the general election. So not only are we reckoning with when do you knock down something that is false, but how do you deal with a conspiracy theory that's this elaborate when now a mainstream figure, a nominee of a major party, is a QAnon follower? That makes it a lot harder to ignore. You can't just say that's nonsense, we're not going to amplify that. You've now got to just reckon with it. You're seeing stories in *The New York Times* yesterday, a long story, analyzing why there were QAnon followers. Who are these people?

How embedded are they in the Republican party? When six months ago, I think if you'd ask most people who read *The New York Times*, they wouldn't have heard of QAnon.

Amanda Connolly: André, where do you draw that line in your own work?

André Picard: When I look at health claims, for example, I've told my colleagues and younger journalists that what I don't write is just as important as what I do write. We have to make very judicious use of the garbage can, so we get all kinds of crap that comes across our mail, our email, and you have to be able to reject most of it. And I think that's really important. I don't deal with the QAnons of the world yet. I'm sure they're making their way into health care, but things like pharma companies promoting this as a lifesaving drug. You've got to dig through that and sometimes you really want to say, "Wow, this is just total nonsense. I'm going to write about it." But then you realize it's much better that the nonsense just goes in the garbage can and no one's the wiser for it. I think that's very important, to have that weeding out. There's so much pressure, especially with the internet, just to crank out stuff, fill the black hole. But you have to find that balance.

And it's easier for me. I'm old, I've been around, editors let me write what I want. It's a lot more difficult for a younger reporter to say here's a press release rewrite this, to say this is total garbage. You're not going to say that to your boss, you're going to say I'll redo this, I'll rewrite it and that's my job.

Tom Rosenstiel: We have got to change that. We need to listen to everybody in the newsroom.

André Picard: That's how we're going to get more diversity of views — listen to different people. That is a real flaw of newsrooms.

Amanda Connolly: I wonder what both of your experience throughout this has been. I'm looking at mental health for reporters, looking at that weight, and that stress, and that responsibility on people in the industry right now to oftentimes be reporting about these crisis-level situations as they're happening at the same time as you're trying to navigate the personal reality of it. Having sick relatives, having uncertainty about work, and jobs, and rent, and shutdowns, and things like that. How have you managed to navigate life and also being a journalist covering this?

André Picard: I've written about mental health for a long time, and I think that's one of the happiest things in my career, how our views of mental health have changed, how there's less stigma, much greater openness. And I think even more so with younger people much more willing to talk about it and that's great. At our newsroom we have my paper,

which is a big paper. We have a COVID team, and we meet every morning, and that's the first thing we talk about. It's not like an old-style newsroom with "what are you giving me Picard?" It's how are you feeling, how's your family doing? And this has changed dramatically because of COVID. We're much more conscious about it and I think that is a very good thing. The bosses will say, "Listen, take a mental health day. You don't seem to be doing too well." And we have to have those conversations. I think that's really, really important. And that's good for our newsrooms, it's good for us personally.

Tom Rosenstiel: I hear the pressure is actually at the highest level. It's the burn-out factor. Friends of mine who run newsrooms are burning out more than some of the younger reporters who recognize that this is the most important moment, this pandemic and what's going on with democracy around the world. It's the most important story that they will ever cover. My generation, I came into the business in 1980 in between the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War and now. My generation were inspired by that Watergate era. We never had a story as important as this. Journalism's never been harder and never been more critical.

André Picard: And never been more important to have a longer-term vision. I love that my boss says every morning it's great if you can get me five stories this week, but it's way more important that you can give me 50 in the next year. So pace yourself. This is a marathon. It's not a sprint and it's a marathon where there's no finish line. You have to be conscious of that.

Tom Rosenstiel: This relates to one other thing. We've touched on it, but not quite so directly, and that is that news was subsidized largely by advertising. You have the CBC in Canada, we do not have anything comparable in the United States. PBS is not a comparable operation. When advertising was the economic model and we moved to the internet, we thought that page views and clickbait were going to be our future. The fact that we're shifting to a subscription model means we're measuring engagement on the internet quite differently. We are discovering empirically that these longer formed stories that are more meaningful, that we think as journalists are better journalism, are also more valuable than we thought. It turns out when you start looking at subscribers rather than just page views, that what we thought was the spinach turns out to be the catnip.

André Picard: True, and when we have stories that's what we want. We want sticky stories, we want the stories that people stay with for 10 minutes, not that they just read the headline and move on. They can get those anywhere. You want that stickiness, you want people to dig into it, sink their teeth in.

Tom Rosenstiel: Right. A URL that is still valuable three weeks later is the kind of story we always thought was a better story anyway. And it turns out it's a more reliable story.

Amanda Connolly: Amazing. I want to ask each of you what do you think are going to be the big takeaway legacies from this that journalism will stick with, even after this situation and through the medium term, a year, two years, five years down the road. What do you think will stay and what do you hope to see stay?

Tom Rosenstiel: You're tricking me. I'm a guest in your country. So that's very hard to say. I hope that the reckoning over default culture in newsrooms is something that we are sticking

with because there's just no way that, to oversimplify it, in the United States at least, traditional journalism is appealing to older liberals and largely white. We need to begin to reach people who are younger, people of colour, and conservatives. If we don't broaden our base to reach those folks, it's not going to be sustainable. Regardless of what medium, whether you're talking about newspapers or television or anything else. We're all moving to the streaming environment. And that means beginning to listen to audiences, to understand them better, not to lecture at them. These things that we've been talking about for 20 years are now financial existentially important questions. I hope that that reckoning sticks with us. One thing we've got to deal with in the United States is this question of Trump, which is such an existential challenge to journalists because he says we're the enemy of the people.

So how do you cover someone in a disinterested way who says you're the enemy? It's very, very difficult and a lot of journalists are falling into the trap of being at war with him. We're going to have to recover from that and the scars from that battle. There's going to be PTSD that will affect the industry for several years.

André Picard:

I shouldn't have let Tom go first because he had the best answer. I think the diversity part of the package, the reckoning of what our newsrooms look like is going to be really important, so I'll move to a secondary issue. And I think the secondary issue, again, comes back to my passion, which is the health-care part. I think this pandemic is teaching us that health is not just about medicine, it's not about drugs. It's about economics, it's about social change, it's about the marginalized. If we have this view that health is much more broad than it's very political at its root, I think that's going to be good for our understanding and the way we write, and the way we tackle all manner of subjects. I think going forward we're going to write about climate change differently because of the pandemic, we're going to write about deficits differently. Deficits are not going to matter as much because we realize that the most important health intervention we had in this pandemic were the bailouts of individuals. That was the single most important health measure.

This is something that the United States doesn't have and that's why Canada is doing better. I hope that this will teach us to look at things differently. I think the pandemic has forced us to rethink how institutions operate fundamentally — justice, politics, media. And, ultimately, all of that will be good. There are going to be some growing pains along the way, but I'm looking forward to the younger people, the more diverse journalists, diverse opinion, diverse looking, diverse speaking. I'm looking for them to run with this and really make journalism better and very different in the short and the long term.

Tom Rosenstiel:

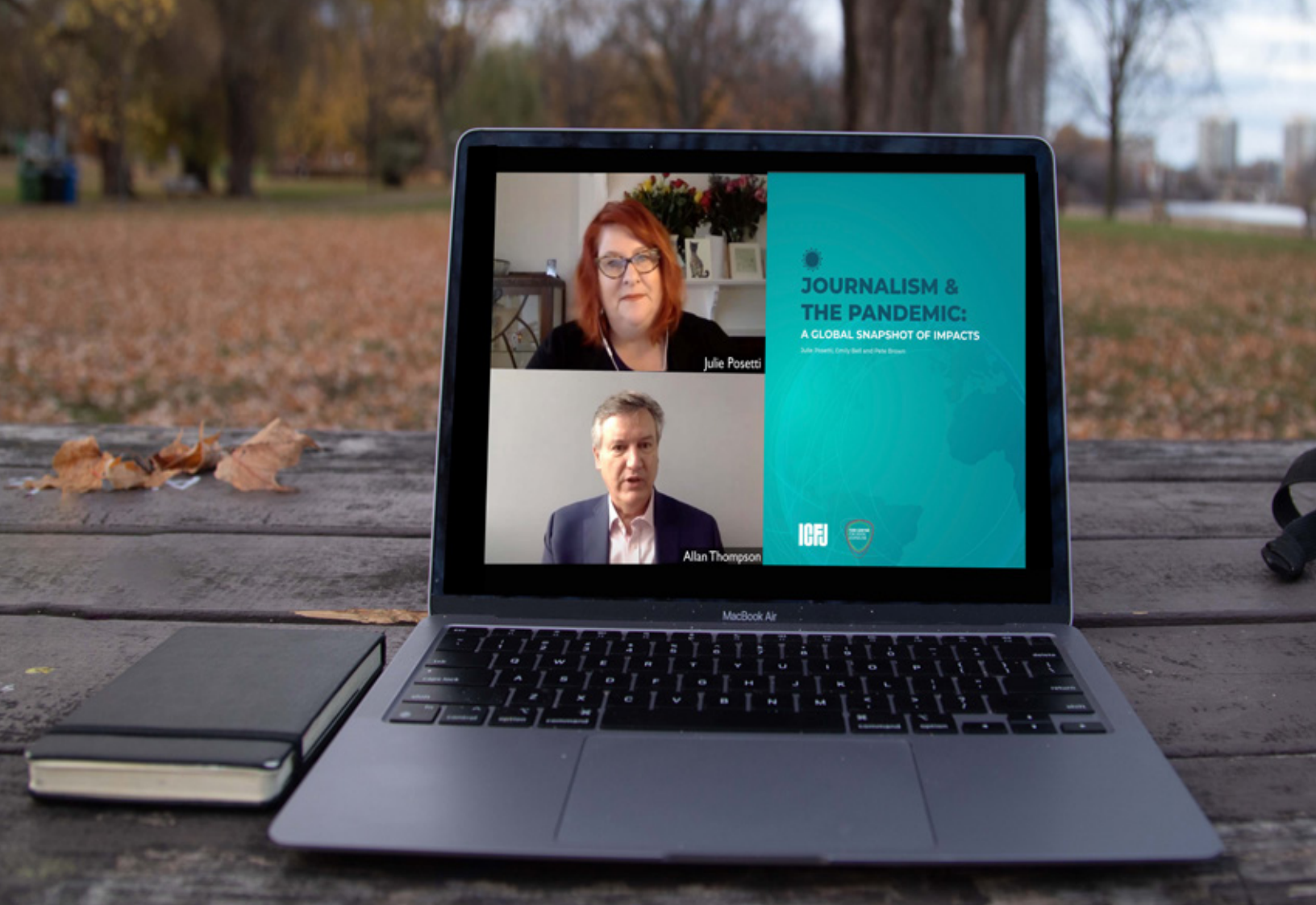
I would add to that because I think that's a really important point, André, that at least in the United States we're not trusting our officials to tell us about those things either. We're going into the street and finding that out for ourselves directly from hospitals. In the case of talking to scientists, you're relying on experts, but what's going on elsewhere? We've done a lousy job of covering our health-care system in the United States because we cover the policy debate over it when actually we should be covering what's going on in our health-care system in people's lives. I think the pandemic has pushed us to that because our leaders are irrelevant. Their policy debates are about strange things that aren't affecting people's lives.

Amanda Connolly: We've got one more question for Tom from Allan Thompson who, of course, has done a phenomenal job organizing this entire forum. The question is, "Tom, will the next edition of your text, *The Elements of Journalism*, have to add a new element after COVID?"

Tom Rosenstiel: Well, it just so happens that I'm working on a fourth edition. That's why the book is sitting here right now. I'm doing a new edition that is due right after the election. The book, for people who don't know, talks about what are the core principles of journalism. And they're not esoteric. The first one is, as I've mentioned before, tell the truth. The second one is you have to be independent of the people you cover. And they go on through that about proportionality. I would say the simple answer, there are 10 elements in the book. We're not adding an 11th element or anything, but the way that you fulfill these obligations, these responsibilities has changed dramatically. We still have the obligation to tell the truth, but when people already have these facts in front of them or have some narrative version in front of them and we're trying to chase what they know, how we tell the truth, how we live up to that obligation is drastically different. This new edition will be post pandemic, perhaps post Trump.

It will have to deal with the fact that trust in the United States toward media is profoundly broken. Much more so than in Canada based on Chris Waddell's presentation earlier today. It's amazing how the last edition came out in 2014 and it feels like the world has changed twice since then.

Amanda Connolly: Absolutely. As we keep hearing, we live in terribly uncertain times. Certainly there is no end in sight to any of that, so thank you to both of you so much for joining us here today and helping us break this down a little bit more.



JOURNALISM IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

RESEARCH

KEYNOTE BY JULIE POSETTI

Introduction: Allan Thompson, Associate Director, School of Journalism and Communication/
Journalism Program Head, Carleton University

Speaker: Julie Posetti, International Centre for Journalists

Allan Thompson: Good morning, everyone. My name is Allan Thompson. I'm the program head of the journalism department at Carleton University and we're hosting this two-day symposium, Journalism in the Time of Crisis. I'd like to begin by acknowledging that Carleton University is situated on the unceded and unsundered territory of the Algonquin nation.

Welcome back to day two. We had a great first day yesterday. There are now more than 1,000 people registered for this event, which is quite remarkable.

Our research keynote joining us today from Oxford in the United Kingdom, Julie Posetti, is the global director of research with the International Centre for Journalists. She's also a lead researcher on a joint study being conducted by the ICFJ and Columbia University's Tow Center for Digital Journalism. That study is looking at the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for journalism. And fortunately for us, very fortunately, not only can Julie be with us, but one of the project's first research reports has just been released. And that is the focus of Julie's presentation today.

Good morning, Julie. When we first spoke some months back when I saw that you were doing this incredible work, we originally wanted you to have joined us yesterday. And you said, "Oh no, no, that can't work. That's my birthday. I'm celebrating a big birthday. I'm going to be in Paris."

Julie Posetti: So I thought.

Allan Thompson: You're looking pretty good for having made that trip to Paris yesterday for your birthday.

Julie Posetti: Yes, it's a birthday with a big zero. I'll let you guess which decade, but it's one that has made me feel quite ancient. And I'm very glad to be here albeit not in person. But yes, stuck in Oxford, which is certainly not an awful place to be by any stretch.

Allan Thompson: Great. Well, thank you very much for joining us. Julie's going to lead us through with some slides to assist some of the findings of this research project. So for now, over to you, Julie.

Julie Posetti: Thanks very much.

This will be a detailed presentation. It's going to be a lot of data. I know how much we love data. I'm a journalist, as I've said, as well as an academic and there is nothing I love more than a statistically grounded story. But that means that it can feel a little overwhelming. But if you can concentrate on maybe one or two points that really resonate with you, and perhaps you have a question that you want to formulate to pose to us in the chat, that'll allow us to have a more integrated and interactive conversation at the end of the formal presentation.

As Allan said, I'm the lead author of the first report from the journalism and the pandemic project that was conducted with Emily Bill, who is the director and professor at the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University, and her research director, Pete Brown. I'm also affiliated with the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, and I'm a senior researcher attached to Sheffield University's Centre for Freedom of the Media. I'm drawing on that academic expertise and also

three decades as a journalist to add some analysis and texture to the findings that we have, which was published just last week. This really is hot off the press. And, as I understand it, a copy of the full report, which is 30 key findings and about 20-odd graphs and charts. I think Allan has put that on the website for this conference on the project attached to it, and I'll add it to the chat as we go forward.

As I said, this is a project that came out of the concern that was mounting at the beginning of the pandemic, February, March of this year. Emily and I had a conversation about what we could do that would allow us to both map the impact of the first wave of COVID-19 on journalism and journalists globally. And we decided to start with a global survey. We conducted that survey in seven languages. This first report is based on an analysis of 1,406 very carefully vetted survey responses in English, because we wanted to quickly get some of these findings into the field. So, it's a substantial set of respondents that we're dealing with.

When we decided to launch this survey, it was around the time that Canadian journalist Craig Silverman had referred to the pandemic as being perhaps an extinction event for news media. So we wanted to map the impacts, but also to try to understand as quickly as possible, what the implications of those impacts were and to try and surface immediately, or at least as quickly as possible, some evidence-based recommendations about how we might survive this pandemic, not necessarily in a physical sense, but in a journalistic sense, to ensure that public interest journalism and public interest media in particular, which we believe are a vibrant component of democracies, were able to continue.

I'm going to run through some of the data behind the participants. As I said, we had 1,406 journalists, they came from 125 countries. And as you can see, the top countries for these English-speaking participants were the United States, then India, Nigeria, the United Kingdom and Brazil. Canadians were certainly participants. I think they were sixth or seventh on the list. But what's great from our perspective is that we're not just looking at Western liberal democracies in terms of the English-speaking respondents, but we have participants from a wide range of countries. The other languages in which we conducted the survey, were Portuguese, Spanish, French, Arabic. I'm going to forget a country or a rather language group, we had Chinese and Russian as well. And I'll try and get that data out before we finish this session to make sure I'm across all of the language groups that are still under investigation.

Some of the other data points that you might find interesting, we had 53 percent identifying as women 46 percent identifying as men, and about half a percent identifying as non-binary participants. Two-thirds of our participants were aged 25 to 49, 50 percent of them came from what they identified as legacy, print or broadcast news media, and 23 percent came from digital born outlets. So we have a nice split between those representing more traditional outlets, albeit traditional outlets that typically had online publications, and the more start-up style organizations.

Just to give you a top note in terms of the role breakdown of these journalists, 29 percent said they were news reporters. But we also had 14 percent identifying as top editorial leadership or newsroom managers. Again, if you dig into the report, you'll see other roles identified, some of them are on the commercial side and we're using

the term journalists in a generic way to represent a range of roles that exists within professional journalism.

Sixty-three percent were full-time employees and a quarter were freelancers, or people who identified themselves as short-term contractors. So that just gives you a bit of detail to understand who we're talking about when we refer to the participants and respondents here. The first question, just to dig right into the difficult elements of this study in terms of our findings, what's most difficult about covering COVID-19 for our respondents? You can see some of the data points on the screen there.

I want to elaborate on some of these, because it's quite clear when you look at this top number of responses, there were more options that people could select, and you'll find those in the full study. But it's quite clear that while putting themselves at great physical risk to cover COVID-19, if the reporters were on the front line, and about a quarter of our respondents were still reporting from the front line, there was also a really serious mental health crisis in evidence. And our respondents were indicating, just as we've seen in other smaller-scale surveys, that they were struggling to cope at an emotional and psychological level as well as a physical level. So, 70 percent rated the psychological and emotional impacts of dealing with the crisis as the most difficult aspect of their work. And this question that these responses were made in reference to, very much focused on in the daily course of their work, what were the most difficult things?

We saw a similar number identifying concerns about financial hardship, the intensity of the workload and you had burnout, a lack of sleep or a lack of opportunity to rest between shifts, social isolation and the risk of contracting the virus ranked at number five, which I found both interesting and familiar, that sense of journalists in the course of reporting on disasters or in war zones of just trying to continue their work, putting your physical safety second to the actual sense of responsibility to report what's happening before you and to inform your audiences. That speaks to both the resilience and determination as characteristics of journalists, but it also highlights the increased risk of burnout and fatigue that comes from that exposure.

When we dug deeper into some of the questions related to the emotional and psychological impacts, which are not reflected on this slide, but I'm just going to speak to some of the other findings. We saw 82 percent of respondents reporting at least one negative emotional or psychological reaction in response to the pandemic, and two-thirds reported multiple negative health impacts. So, the top five negative reactions affected at least one-third of respondents. Here you are seeing a picture of very significant personal suffering in reference to the pandemic, including in the course of their daily work.

The top five reactions that I just referenced were: increased anxiety; exhaustion and burnout; more difficulty sleeping; a sense of helplessness; and dark and negative thoughts. We also saw significant representation of people being diagnosed with depression for the first time, of worsening depression and of people being diagnosed with anxiety for the first time among other responses, that data is in the full report. Unsurprisingly, given that pretty bleak picture, 15 percent of respondents reported having sought psychological support to help them through this first wave

of COVID-19. The survey was conducted between mid-May and the end of June for about six weeks, this year. So, just at the peak and then the end of what we might refer to as the first wave of COVID-19. And broadly speaking, we are now heading full force into the second wave of COVID-19 on a global scale.

The stress that these respondents conveyed, can be understood in part with reference to some of these other findings. One of them is that employers seemed to be those represented by our respondents failing to adequately support or respond to the mental health impacts and the physical overload that the journalists were reporting. And that's true, not just for mental health, as I said, it's physical as well.

Really alarmingly, from a journalism safety perspective, we can see from this data point on the screen that 30 percent of our respondents said that their news organizations were sending journalists into the field without any safety equipment for field reporting, not a mask, not a pair of gloves, no hand sanitizer, no social distancing equipment for recording and reporting, which to me is a really alarming statistic given this is a deadly pandemic and journalists are indeed exposed in ways, not at the same level necessarily of course as frontline medical staff, but certainly, whether they're reporting from protests connected to COVID-19, whether they're reporting within the hospital system, whether they're interviewing families and survivors, whether they're reporting from refugee camps, where we have had some serious outbreaks. This is, as I say, an alarming figure. And I would argue it's some evidence of neglect by certain employers.

We also found that 25 percent of our respondents were still reporting from the field at least once a week, and 38 percent were still reporting from the field at least once a month. There's also a problem when it comes to responding to the psychological and burnout consequences. We found that 85 percent of respondents were not receiving any support, whether that be counselling or some other social or emotional support.

Moving on to more data that I'm afraid is quite disturbing. Thankfully, there are some bright spots at the end of this survey, which we'll come to, but I think it's really important to acknowledge all of these serious impacts up front. We saw that journalists in their reporting, whether in a digital socially distanced way or in a front line reporting context, that they were exposed to significant threats and quite chilling restrictions on their reporting. One of the reasons is because as we and others have pointed out, there's been an escalation in attacks on media freedom and journalism safety during this period. We've seen state actors and others using the pandemic as a cloak to enable the extension of for instance, existing threats to media freedom or to mount new restrictions. One example would be the so-called fake news laws that have been either enacted or extended or rolled out during the course of the pandemic. And I'll come to the disinformation threat in a moment.

To take some of these data points, one in 10 of our respondents said they'd been publicly abused by a politician or an elected official in the course of their work. Now, for those of you who are deeply engrossed in the coverage of the US election and elections in various other settings, this will come as no surprise that journalists feel under attack from political actors. We can see that certainly in the case of President Donald Trump with the demonization of journalists and journalism in particular news brands, and that's not exclusive to the United States. It's happening all around the

world from the Philippines to Australia. I'm not entirely familiar with the situation in Canada, but I know that there have been issues with journalists being targeted by populist political actors and others.

A similar number, 14 percent reported being subjected to direct censorship. We had 20 percent saying that their experience of online abuse was "much worse than usual during the periods," and three percent said they'd been attacked physically in the course of their work, while similar numbers have been detained or arrested or charged. As my colleague Joel Simon, from the Committee to Protect Journalists pointed out recently, we haven't seen as many arrests as we might have anticipated. They've often been connected to protest or specific actions, but it's a general increase in hostility and an increase in attacks by members of the public. And we're talking on and offline here as well.

So, 34 percent of our respondents indicated that they had experienced some form of attempt to restrict access to information or chill critical reporting. And they indicated that that ranged from being excluded from government press conferences to say having their permits to report revoked, freedom of movement being limited and even expulsion from foreign countries. During this period, several former colleagues of mine from ABC were indeed expelled from China, just as one example. Digital security threats were also a feature of the press freedom challenges that we uncovered through this survey. We had respondents talking about government surveillance, about 77 percent of our respondents said they were aware that they were under government surveillance. We also saw evidence of targeted digital security attacks like malware and phishing, DDoS attacks and forced data handover. And this was all attributed to the environment of COVID-19.

In parallel, unsurprisingly given that data picture so far, journalists we surveyed talked about their sources feeling reluctant to come forward, reluctant to speak, and citing concerns about repercussions and reprisals due to COVID-19 restrictions and attacks on whistleblowers, which is something that Transparency International and others have reported during COVID-19. We're seeing this pattern of attack and abuse and restriction and censorship, but also, the flow and effects of that on sources themselves, and especially whistleblowers. Nearly half of our respondents, 48 percent, said that their sources had expressed concern about reprisals for speaking to them and that was on or off the record. Most of them were concerned about losing their jobs, but fear of being fined or jailed, or physically attacked were also prominent features of their reluctance.

This is a picture that identifies how much pressure journalists are under at a personal level, but also in terms of the ability to do their work. Our study also digs into the adaptations that are needing to be made to deal with things such as social distancing and the shutdowns that are occurring within communities to try and deal with the pandemic. But these are the more insidious elements that I'm highlighting here. On top of all that, is the severity of the economic impacts of the pandemic. We have a slide that represents the percentage of decline in revenue, represented by people who had knowledge of their news organization's financial situation. Seventeen percent of those identified that revenues had dropped by more than 75 percent, which is just staggering to think about, and points to the number of news organization closures, and various restrictions on printing and distribution.

So revenue fell by more than 50 percent at outlets represented by 43 percent of our respondents who had access to that data.

They also talked about the closure of news outlets, in some cases permanently, salary cuts, layoffs, increases in unpaid overtime being required, reductions in working hours and shifts, the cessation of prints, and that could be temporary or also it could be permanent, and a whole bunch of other really biting austerity measures. We've seen this detailed by my colleagues at the Tow Center with their newsroom tracker in the United States where they've identified really substantial numbers of closures, particularly in the area of local journalism. In our survey, 89 percent of respondents indicated that they'd been affected by at least one austerity measure. And of those, seven percent reported that their outlets had ceased print editions and 11 percent reported reduced print runs.

From some of the data collected at the very outset of the pandemic, there was a significant increase in eyeballs on news content. Many news organizations removed paywalls or temporarily suspended them to ensure people had access to reliable information that was shared in the public interest, there was some hope that there would be a subsequent or parallel increase in subscriptions or membership. We haven't necessarily seen evidence of that yet. We're still in a period where there is a great recalibration going on based on the fact that internationally, there were still many news organizations reliant significantly or exclusively on advertising revenue. And when the bottom fell out of that in the pandemic, as a result of shutdowns around the world, and advertisers connected to businesses were suffering extremely. We've seen really severe impacts on those sectors of the news medium.

There's a lot to unpack just in that, but I'll leave it there for now and move on to the really serious crisis we have in disinformation, and colleagues have studied disinformation responses among news organizations, governments and the platforms, for example, in a big UN study, which I'll mention at the end of this, we refer to this phenomenon as a disinfodemic. Various terms have been used, the World Health Organization refers to an infodemic, we talk about a disinfodemic because while the infodemic refers to the general flood or torrent of information, what we have identified is a really significant pandemic level spread, a viral load of disinformation, if you like. Therefore, we focus these questions on the ways in which journalists were encountering disinformation, COVID-19 related in their daily work.

As you can see, the encounters with disinformation were quite significant. To give you one data point based on an aggregation from various questions, over 80 percent of our respondents reported encountering COVID-19 disinformation at least once a week, but it was much more common for most of them. In fact, as you can see, one-third or over one-third reported seeing disinformation many times a week, and 28 percent said, many times a day. And this is the first large scale survey of journalists since the pandemic began. So I think disinformation is particularly interesting to get a sense of how journalists are experiencing this disinformation crisis since they are both targets of disinformation actors, but also their job of reporting on a pandemic of this scale and significance is made so much more difficult by the flood of disinformation.

Who did journalists cite as top sources of disinformation? It's not surprising that about half identified regular citizens when you consider what we know about QAnon,

for example, as a disinformation laced conspiracy theory that is spread peer-to-peer on social networks. But, if you look at those breakdowns for political leaders and elected officials and identifiable government agencies or their spokespeople, and also government sponsored troll networks, you can see that, even though we can't technically represent a figure that's cumulative there, the second top identifiable group is political leaders and elected officials. We also had significant responses to those other groups of political actors.

What we see is evidence of a real lack of trust in political and governmental actors, based on a perception of those government officials being a major source of disinformation. Again, this correlates with other research that has identified, in fact colleagues at the Reuters Institute, produced a study earlier in the year that identified political actors and celebrities as top sources of disinformation. And that deployed a different methodology. They weren't asking journalists about this, but we're starting to see correlations through different elements of research, identifying those groups. I think that highlights really, the serious problem we have with democracy and the threat to elections that comes with this level of disinformation, although this is specifically in reference to a pandemic.

The next question I'll point to the results from is, where COVID-19 disinformation is spreading prolifically. As you can see, and this should come as no surprise given the current news discourses, that Facebook was most frequently identified as a prolific disinformation spreader or vector, so 66 percent identified Facebook. But it's also important to note that Facebook owned WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook Messenger, which were also identified as prolific spreaders rather of disinformation.

The next highest nominated group in the social media companies' space was Twitter, with 42 percent of respondents saying they were a prolific disinformation vector or enabler. But that's a pretty big gap between Twitter and Facebook. And I think it's also particularly relevant when you consider that Twitter is really a preferred social media space for journalists doing their work within the social journalism territory.

Some other data points on this that are relevant to bring forward, when it came to reporting disinformation to the platforms, 82 percent of respondents said they'd reported disinformation to at least one of the companies we identified. That's a relatively high rate of an attempt to get action in response to disinformation that the journalists had seen, and a quarter said they had reported disinformation to Facebook, which was by far the biggest group identifying a specific platform that they had reported disinformation to. But what happened when they reported this disinformation?

Well, 46 percent of our respondents said they were dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the social media companies' responses and only eight percent were satisfied. In fact, and I think this is important to underline, the most common response was that they received actually no response at all. So, very frustrating. And this, despite all of the public relations from social media companies around the epic efforts they're making during the pandemic to combat disinformation. We can see from this evidence that they are not succeeding, at least not in the eyes of journalists who we surveyed, in dealing with this quickly enough, or seriously enough.

There are a number of disconnects and paradoxes evident in the research from our analysis. One example is the fact that 20 percent of our journalist respondents said online harassment was much worse during the pandemic, which I mentioned earlier, but 96 percent indicated their employers were offering no help in dealing with the problem.

Now we have a situation with online violence, particularly against women journalists, where this has been recognized increasingly as a serious problem and a global phenomenon. We've seen improvements in the way news organizations are responding. But there's evidence that this is not happening in a way that's meaningful enough or actionable enough based on our responses, and particularly given what we know about the politicization of the pandemic and the way in which that has resulted in disinformation campaigns that target journalists. This is alarming to us that so very few journalists in our survey indicated they had access to some support or training to help them deal with online violence.

We say that knowing that, of course, trying to undertake or offer training in the middle of a pandemic is not an easy thing to do, but it's the lack of a sense of support or a lack of understanding about what could be done that was significant. And in the same territory of paradoxes and disconnects, while Facebook was identified as such a prolific vector for disinformation and the journalists were so dissatisfied with the responses they were getting, at the same time we see that there is an increased reliance on social media platforms for reporting, for audience engagement and for distribution. That's necessary, of course, in the context of socially distanced reporting. But we do have a situation here that does require some deep thought and analysis. How do we go about this process of decoupling from social media companies from an over reliance or from exposure to what I call platform capture, if we're forced into closer relationships with those platforms in a time of crisis like this?

That's just one example. There's also the dichotomy of evidence in the relationship between journalists and politicians and elected officials. We know that data points about the sources of disinformation being at the level of 46 percent in reference to politicians and elected officials according to our respondents, but at the same time 32 percent were relying more heavily on government sources and official statements. Some were being restricted from access to sources when they needed to interrogate or question or access information. But these 32 percent all felt that they were relying more heavily on government sources. Partly also a reflection of the chilling of other sources of information during the period. But we have this disconnect of both the need to rely more on these sources but recognizing these sources as abusive, one in 10, remember, felt that they were being abused, or major sources of disinformation. So, there's a lot to think about there as well, in terms of how we respond to those elements. I promised you some positive news, and I'm coming to that now.

Allan Thompson: Oh good.

Julie Posetti: Exactly. I don't want you all to go away and feel like this is a hopeless case, because it's not. And here is why. We found that 61 percent of journalists we surveyed felt an increased commitment to journalism. In fact, despite all of those serious mental health and psychological and emotional reactions that I talked about earlier, the

top three emotional and psychological reactions were in fact positive. And the one reporting 61 percent, they felt an increased commitment to journalism was top among those. We also found that journalists said they felt closer to their family and friends and more appreciative of life, which I think are very important things to focus on when we think about how to respond to these other crises that we've identified.

The other thing that I think is a very bright spot is an increase in perception of audience trust during this period. The reporters are saying, or the journalists are saying, 43 percent of them in fact, that they experienced an increase in audience trust. And they base that on a range of things, including the fact that 25 percent of our respondents said that audience feedback was more positive. They also talked about an increase in engagement and an actual increase in a willingness of audiences to collaborate on fact checking, to collaborate on reporting, and really importantly, to provide information to the journalists that they felt would be useful for their reporting. You're seeing this increased investment of audiences and those who are appreciating the role of public interest journalism in the midst of a pandemic, feeding the journalism, which in turn is probably feeding this sense of increased commitment to reporting.

There is evidence of a stronger community investment in journalism and increased engagement. And that, I hope, can give us some insights into what might evolve in terms of journalism's reinvention during this period of a more mission-driven and audience-centred public service approach to reporting, which is where, based on a range of research, we think journalism needs to head. A couple of key questions to think about as we wonder what next: How can audience engagement and trust be strengthened in a socially distant digital environment, but outside the disinformation riddled and abuse-prone social media platforms? And how can journalists hold government and international organizations to account for their management of the pandemic, given the restrictions on independent journalism, including the chilling of sources and the over reliance perhaps on official statements? And also, how can these positive emotional and psychological responses expressed by the journalists we surveyed, along with that increased sense of vocational mission aid with the responses that we might make to the deepening mental health crisis within the profession?

And finally, I'm going to leave you with this slide, which talks about the top needs that the journalists have identified. It's no surprise given everything that we've talked about that funding to cover the operating costs due to the economic impacts was the top identified need. We found 18 percent of our respondents had said that their organizations had already applied for some funding relief in the form of grants. Training on new technologies to support remote reporting and publishing, the same number wanted advanced verification and fact-checking training, which is good to say and highlights the need to respond to disinformation, also a need for increased training on science and medical health, and then at 62 percent, assistance with managing mental health and well-being.

I want to point out a book that I just published with UNESCO on a study that was led by colleagues from the University of Sheffield, lead among them, Professor Kalina Bontcheva, looking at ways to respond to disinformation while respecting freedom of expression. And this goes to that point I made about the weaponization

of fake news laws, for example, and a whole range of other risks. And there are three recommendations on the screen. And I'll put a link to this report too, it's a book-length report, but it's free to download as we go through the question part of this session, but we really are in a situation, I think, where we have to address this crisis in disinformation in a way that is urgent and appropriate with platforms taking responsibility and acting more accountably. At the same time, figuring out how do we ensure that press freedom, that media freedom, that journalism safety is not compromised unnecessarily in this process?

My colleague at UNESCO, the director who commissioned this book, Guy Berger, is on a panel later this afternoon at this conference. So hopefully, he'll be able to dig into some of that. And that is where I'm going to leave the formal presentation and hope to find some questions.

Allan Thompson: Wow. Thank you.

Julie Posetti: So, I guess, a lot to take in.

Allan Thompson: A lot, but also you touched on every panel in this event, right? We have 17 panels, and we're looking at mental health, safety, impact on the industry. Yesterday morning, we started with your former colleague, Richard Fletcher, who, interestingly, was looking at this from the vantage point of the audience.

Julie Posetti: Audience. Exactly.

Allan Thompson: Now you're bringing us to the vantage point of the journalists, and I almost wonder if I should have started this morning with one of those disclaimers that you see on television, the trigger warning, "Please be advised that this presentation will contain shocking information."

Julie Posetti: Do you know what? We almost felt like that with the report as well, that this is a lot to take in. We found two things that journalists are responding with a sense of catharsis. This is confirming for them, it's putting some meat on their feelings and their responses, and they had a sense of not being alone. We had quite a few journalists, very bravely tweeting at us about their own psychological trauma in reference to reporting this, whether that was because of vicarious trauma from exposure to digital data or lived experience of people who had suffered with COVID-19 or a death or just the fatigue, the sheer exhaustion that comes from an ongoing participation. It's bloody hard. There's no sugar coating this.

We started this project with a relative optimism, a lot of people were talking about this being a moment for journalism's reinvention. And when we dug into the data and we were at a stage in the pandemic at that point where it felt so inappropriate to be framing this from that perspective. There is an element of that no doubt, that we've had to speed up the digital transformation of journalism where it was lagging and be very creative in our responses to getting around restrictions on reporting. But we can't over emphasize the opportunity for reimagining journalism at a time when we're still really in the belly of the beast, this pandemic. So, yes, apologies to people who may feel overwhelmed by that, but it is what it is.

Allan Thompson: It's so fascinating. When I asked to talk about the difficulty of doing this work, not one of those top responses dealt with the content in a sense, right? And often I remember the journalistic angst heading out on a story, "Am I going to be able to get this, capture the story, find the sources and the information I need?" This overwhelming preoccupation with mental health, job security, isolation, personal risk of injury or contracting something. So we have a panel coming up right after this on the underreporting of the racialized impact of COVID, which I think is a huge issue. But I also wonder if and maybe journalists are worried that this will appear to be navel gazing, but is there not a huge story here about the frontline essential workers in journalism, who this research was done halfway through this period? We're entering into the second wave, is this not a major crisis in our industry?

Julie Posetti: Yes. And if you dig into the full report, obviously, I couldn't share all of the data with you in a presentation, but you'll see that ethical challenges also were identified at a significant rate as being issues of great concern. And I would imagine, we haven't had a time yet to dig into the open-ended responses to some of these questions, but I expect to find concerns about issues around inequality of contracting the virus, inequality of frontline workers insofar as racial and cultural, structural issues. I mean, it's the same picture around the world. I'm in the United Kingdom, and we see a disproportionate number of South Asian, and African and Caribbean origin people who are working in essential services. That's everything from garbage collecting to nursing and medicine. And we see contraction rates that are really alarming, and access to health services. The United Kingdom has, like Canada, a universal approach to health care, but there are still structural inequalities that affect that.

I think when we hear from journalists talking about some of the other emotional and psychological consequences, they did go to being confronted by the extreme grief and suffering. And I'm sure in that mix, we will find evidence of concern about the social injustice that they feel confronted by when they're dealing with that. So that is definitely something that I think, when we dig into also the language-based survey data, because bearing in mind we've got hundreds of other survey respondents in these other languages to consider before we are able to present a very holistic perspective. This is a year-long study. We have about 800 of our participants who have identified that they want to continue as subjects of this research. We plan to go back to them successively to do that.

But I think what you see, certainly from what we've presented so far is that sense of mission-driven journalism, part of which is about diversity and understanding. The diversity of your audiences and how to respond to those issues of diversity. And that goes to the question of trust as well, which we're seeing and touched on here. For me, the most encouraging and positive thing is actually evidence of this search for reconnecting with audiences in a very deep way. We're not talking about clicks here, we're talking about producing content that literally could save lives, ensuring that people are able to benefit from classic accountability journalism, where there is a determination to ensure forensic interviewing as a method of extracting appropriate details.

So, I think for me, despite the depressing overtones of that presentation, I did come away from this analysis with my own increased sense of vocational mission, which

is why it's so important for us, collectively and collaboratively to fight for a future for public interest media. So that turned into a sermon.

Allan Thompson:

As part of that future, I wonder, and maybe someone's already talked about this idea, but now we're traditional, professionally trained journalists working for legacy or digital-born actual publications. We're in competition with social media actors who are using media such as platforms to also share information and views and opinion, which our audience can often not distinguish, and this is where there is misinformation. Why is it that we do not have our own distinct social media platform, call it Veritas?

So instead of going to Twitter or Facebook to find your news, you will still use those channels for certain things. But instead of going into that swamp, where you have to figure out who's a troll and who's not, could we not as journalists and in this industry, get our act together and agree on an international consortium of verified news outlets that will disseminate their product on veritas.com, and people will know that when they go to that social media channel, they do not have to discern the crap from the real content.

Julie Posetti:

I think that touches on several attempts that are being made currently and that's a great idea. If you think about Maria Ressa, who's really the emblematic case of an independent journalist in a start-up organization, who built a journalism outlet around social action and community service, who then became the victim and target of weaponized social media platforms, online violence, fuelled and driven by the state. Apart from all of the charges she's facing and the conviction, which are politically motivated, her true belief and what she is embarking on now with her team, is to do just that, try to find a tech-based solution that is journalism led, journalism driven, that does allow the integration of communities but also brings in and revalues curation.

We went through a period of dramatic, I hate using the word "disruption," because it's one of those tech terms like platform that denotes something that is not as significant as what actually happened. This was a revolutionary period where the tools of news production and commentary were democratized with many very positive effects. But at the same time, there was a period where I think many of us who worked in digital journalism and study felt a bit embarrassed about the attempt to reassert editorial professional curation as a gold standard, when we had to acknowledge that a human rights lawyer who blogged and a medical expert who ran a newsletter about disease A, that these were, of course, reliable, trustworthy sources who were not journalists.

We had to go through this period of really redefining the boundaries of factual reporting and sources of news and information in a way that was more collaborative with trusted sources and experts. Now we're in a period where we have to reinforce and recognize the value of professional curation, especially underlining ethical, independent, critical journalism. I come from Australia, where the former prime minister, Kevin Rudd, is currently calling for a royal commission into the Murdoch press because of its disinformation-prone coverage and its effect on Australian democracy.

This is a complex question. It's not a case of all media being innocent and all criticism of the media being illegitimate, that's not the case at all. But we are in a very, very dangerous period where it becomes so hard for citizens in terms of who to vote for, in terms of what medicine to take, or which drugs to reject, to determine what is true to the extent that it's not even what is true and false anymore. Everything is too hard to process and we're not going to believe anything.

Allan Thompson: Your categorization and the question about disinformation, misinformation, where's it coming from when people say political leaders and elected officials is one category, attention-seeking trolls as another category, and we've got a president of the United States who actually fits better in the attention-seeking troll category than the political leader category.

Julie Posetti: You're not the first person to make that observation.

Allan Thompson: And yet, what do we do? We just keep saying this and we sound partisan or that we've lost objectivity. But it's a huge challenge. I keep asking people, so what is the most important lesson that we're going to draw from this pandemic? And it's why we called the conference, "journalism in the time of crisis" rather than journalism and the pandemic.

I do wonder about this misinformation piece. Here's a time when people really need reliable, trustworthy journalism to navigate their lives and to stay alive.

Julie Posetti: Yes, literally.

Allan Thompson: And they're having to deal with this dichotomy of trying to decipher, and going forward, I think we really do have to explore more. Rather than being co-opted by social media, now they've become part of our delivery mechanism for sharing our content. Maybe we need our own platform as journalists.

Julie Posetti: Indeed. And back to that Maria Ressa example, they are trying to develop a platform called Lighthouse, which they've started to use but is still in development as they use it, which is drawing on AI and all of the latest technologies, but it's designed in a way to move people to action. There's a great reckoning going on in the United States as you well know, and in other parts of the world — Australia, Canada — where we have wedded ourselves to a US tradition of objectivity. And I have some problems with the way objectivity has traditionally been defined in journalism. I don't think that what we're describing here is an issue of partisanship; I think it's an issue of defensive democracy. It's an issue of human rights support and an opposition to human rights violations.

Those things should not be considered to be partisan; those things are fundamental to our capacity to exist. As public service journalists, which is not to say we necessarily work for a public broadcaster, but we see our role as in the service of the public, then those things are fundamentally important, and that's really taking us back to the roots of journalism. It was speaking truth to power, it was ensuring that there was accountability and that we were providing a service that synthesized information, investigated it and, ultimately, eventually did draw conclusions.

We need to ensure that in these discussions, we're not sidetracked by people who want to say, "You can't draw conclusions in journalism that might reflect badly on a political actor or that equals partisanship." It does not; it equals the outcome of a good investigation hopefully, if you're able to draw a conclusion that political candidate A misappropriated funds, or political candidate B misrepresented the pandemic. These are not partisan conclusions. Sorry, I went off on a sidebar.

Allan Thompson: No, you ended with these key questions, and I think we have a minute or two left I do want to take a question, from Alexander. Journalism is an old institution, an essential and prescribed member of civil society, independent. Why are journalists acting as spectators when they should be fully self-regulating? What is journalism doing to take control of its future and continue providing its duty to society?

Julie Posetti: Do you want me to have a go at answering that?

Allan Thompson: For sure. And that's where we'll end.

Julie Posetti: Okay. That's a complex question. I think you'll find that journalists are increasingly collaborative when it comes to thinking about how the profession might survive. And increasingly willing to have public debates and discussions. This is partly as a product of their engagements with audiences through social media. I don't think journalists are behaving necessarily as spectators. I do think what Allan referred to before as a reluctance to belly-gaze. We grew up in a journalistic environment built on a couple of centuries that suggested that you shouldn't report on yourself, you shouldn't report on your own profession, you should be focused on the outside. And that's true, to an extent.

But you have a situation now where the foundations of democracy are crumbling and bound up with that is the role of independent and critical journalism as a pillar of that democratic functioning. We can't be passive bystanders while journalists are being murdered with impunity, while journalistic institutions are struggling to survive financially, but also in terms of crackdowns on media freedom internationally. That's where I think you're starting to see much more solidarity. And that is solidarity that crosses the boundaries within journalism, so between journalistic organizations, and also internationally with academia and civil society. I think that this is such a challenge that we're seeing increased commitment to that collaboration and even the involvement of states or countries where governments acknowledge the importance, of say Canada and the United Kingdom, to an extent where we have this media freedom coalition that's been triggered by those two states.

I think there's something that that can be drawn from that, which could serve journalism. I also think that audiences need to be brought with us on that path. We need to be able to convince audiences through the production of public interest journalism that serves them that it's an important fight. Media freedom is for everybody. It's not just for journalists. We have a right to know.

Allan Thompson: Julie, I want to thank you. This has been just spectacular and the best day of your new decade by far.

Julie Posetti: Thank you so much.

Allan Thompson: Thank you to everyone for attending.



JOURNALISM IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

MISSING THE STORY: UNDERREPORTING OF THE RACIALIZED IMPACT OF COVID-19

PANEL

Moderator: Adrian Harewood, CBC News Ottawa

Speakers: Beverly Bain, University of Toronto; Danielle Kilgo, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities;
Ashton Lattimore, *Prism*; Shree Paradkar, *The Toronto Star*

Adrian Harewood: Good morning. My name is Adrian Harewood and I am an adjunct professor in the Department of Journalism at Carleton University. I'm also the co-host of CBC Ottawa News at 6:00, the public broadcaster's local newscast here in the nation's capital. I'm honoured to be serving as the moderator for this morning's session Under Reporting of COVID-19's Impact on Racialized Communities. COVID-19 has upended our world in ways few could have imagined a short 10 months ago. The pandemic has provoked the greatest global public health crisis in over a century. Its effects have been catastrophic. To date, nearly 42 million people around the world have contracted the virus. Millions have been hospitalized. In total nearly 1.5 million people have died. Ordinary working people have seen their livelihoods disappear. According to data from the International Labour Organization, the ILO, working hours fell 14 percent during the second quarter of 2020, equivalent to the loss of some 400 million full-time jobs. Many people have lost their homes.

To contain the pandemic's spread, economies have ground to a halt. COVID-19 has become one of the world's most successful and destructive colonizers. When COVID-19 first began to take root, the general public was told by pundits and politicians alike that the virus was the great equalizer, that it didn't discriminate, that it was colour blind, but on the ground, a different picture was emerging. We know now that in Canada, the United States and in Britain, racialized people have borne the brunt of the disease and are suffering at a rate disproportionate to their numbers in the population. In Toronto, Canada's biggest city, the data tells us that Black, Indigenous and other people of colour make up 83 percent of reported COVID-19 cases. And in the State of Michigan, African Americans comprise 14 percent of the population, 33 percent of the reported infections and 40 percent of the deaths. In Britain, Black people are more than four times more likely to die from COVID-19 than white people.

Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are more than three times as likely. The racial disparities are stark, and it should be noted that we're experiencing COVID-19 in the aftermath of the police murder of George Floyd and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement and a global anti-racist movement. We know that media has a significant impact on affecting discourses and shaping public opinion. What are the stories that have been told about COVID-19 and what does that reveal? How have the stories been told? What are the stories or angles that have been missed ignored or obscured? Whom have the stories being told been for? How to explain the under reporting of COVID-19's impact on racialized communities?

To answer these questions, we have assembled a stellar panel. Beverly Bain is a Black queer feminist, anti-racism, anti-capitalist scholar. She teaches in the Women and Gender Studies in the Department of Historical Studies at the University of Toronto, Mississauga campus. Beverly teaches the rights in the areas of Black and diasporic sexualities, violence against women, trans nationalism and anti-capitalism, she has written for the likes of *fizz.org*, *The Conversation*, *newsone.com* and also the *Buffalo Bulletin*.

Shree Paradkar is a *Toronto Star* race and gender columnist. She was the 2018-2019 recipient of the Atkinson Fellowship in Public Policy. Just last August she was appointed *The Star's* first internal ombudsperson, a role *The Star* described as providing a safe place for BiPAP journalists and all journalists to express editorial-

related discrimination and bias concerns if they don't feel comfortable bringing it to their manager directly. She has been a journalist in Bangalore, Mumbai, Singapore and Toronto.

Danielle Kilgo is the John & Elizabeth Bates Cowles Professor of Journalism, Diversity and Equality in the Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Her research examines the interaction among social movements, social media and journalism. In 2020, she received the Lillian Lodge Kopenhaver Outstanding Junior Scholar Award. Danielle currently teaches about race and gender diversity and mass communication.

And finally, Ashton Lattimore is the editor-in-chief at *Prism*. Ashton is a long-time editor and writer whose work focuses on race, culture and the law. Her writing has been published by *The Washington Post*, *Slate*, CNN, *Essence* and other outlets. Prior to joining *Prism*, she was senior writer and managing editor at the University of Pennsylvania Law School and previously was the lead editor at News One. Ashton is also a lawyer. She represented Pennsylvania's governor in the lawsuits that successfully challenged the state's congressional map as an illegal partisan gerrymander resulting in the implementation of a new map in time for the 2018 elections.

That is our panel. The way things are going to work today is each panellist will speak for 10 minutes and that will be followed by a discussion that I will facilitate. I will pose a number of questions, and then we will also invite questions from our audience. I'm going to ask Beverly to get us started. And welcome to you all.

Beverly Bain:

Thank you, Adrian. Thank you all. It's really a pleasure to be here on this panel with all of you and thank you to the School of Journalism for organizing this. I think it's two days of conversations around journalism and the pandemic. I think it's important for me to declare upfront, I am not a journalist. I'm a social scientist and I teach in social sciences and humanities. I'm coming from a perspective of speaking to the larger context and the ways in which I understand how the pandemic has shaped Black and racialized lives and Indigenous lives in this context and how the news actually reflected, or how I understood or saw the news actually reflecting very much a lot of the power dynamics in terms of how the state and how our nation was put together.

That's the perspective I'm coming from. I was struck by the discourses of, "We are all in this together, stay at home and social distance," which shaped the reporting of the coronavirus in its early stages of the pandemic. Not because I thought that was not good advice to help stop the spread of the virus, but that it subverted an entire Black racialized and Indigenous population to a collective "we" that consolidate the Canadian landscape as white, and in so doing I must add what it also did was created an invisibility of those populations as not existing within the landscape. The first months of reporting on the pandemic, what we saw visibly were reporters, were conversations about who were heroes, all reflecting the scores of white frame in terms of what the nation stands for.

So when the media and or state, or medical professionals were using the, "we are all in this together," it was really a consolidation around whiteness. The reporters on all

of the main news channel were primarily white. The medical professionals, except Dr. Tam, Chief Public Health Officer of Canada were all visibly white. She was the only scientist, Asian, whose expertise on the handling of the crisis was questioned by a Conservative MP accusing her of protecting China's interest over that of Canada.

We see within this whole conversation and the way the discourses and the way in which the media also took this up, without question was the way in which Dr. Tam was called to task for not actually being able to provide the consistent kind of information, which nobody was able to provide at that point, actually, nowhere, not in the United States, not in Canada, yet she was somehow expected to be so clear, succinct and knowledgeable, and the fact that she was also like everybody else working through what the parameters should have been. And because she was Chinese, she was immediately linked to some sort of underhanded implication in protecting China's interests, as opposed to being more or less protecting that of Canadians.

We were witnessing refrains and discourses on the need to consolidate and safeguard the nation in mainstream reporting that was silencing the historical and socio-economic inequalities, racism and colonialism that shaped this nation, which would mean that some of us would be more at risk of contracting the virus than others based on these inequalities. We know that poverty, and homelessness creates pre-situations to illness. And we know that statistics show, not just in the United States because again, Canada tends to look around for the oppression of Black people and racialized people elsewhere other than here, when in fact, Blacks in particular live in under-housed, underserved communities in this country in other parts of Canada and experience racism and other forms of oppression on a day-to-day basis.

We know that during this time, Indigenous communities were being wiped out by the coronavirus yet the news was not reflecting any of that, even though there's a pre-existing history here of Indigenous communities being wiped out economically, socio-politically, environmentally, which means they would be predisposed to the coronavirus even so. There is an intellectual and a socio-economic political basis to already understand that this is actually inherent in the construction of this nation.

Those who were converted to essential workers, meaning those who were the outsiders became insiders in this moment through these discourses, were primarily Black and racialized women who were frontline workers in health facilities, cleaners and grocery clerks, yet race only entered the frame of reporting in the context of danger, i.e., the Yellow Peril, that being the linking of the coronavirus to Wuhan China, to Dr. Tam and frontline Black and Filipino PSWs, and caregivers and health institutions who were blamed for the spread of the virus in those institutions. While the media did not create these discourses, it reinforced them in its reporting, which has always been shaped as objective and factually based. In other words, outside of power. Michel-Rolph Trouillot one of the most prominent Haitian scholars tells us that facts are not created equal. The production of traces is always also the creation of silences.

In other words, facts get produced within particular socio-historical context that produces particular groups of people. And in this case, Black, racialized and

Indigenous populations as either belonging, non-belonging, as disposable or already dead. The universalizing ex-nomination, and essentializing frames that shape and reinforce media reporting of the coronavirus could only make legible the presence of Black, racialized and Indigenous populations through public health discourses linked to social control and surveillance.

During this particular time, we were seeing that, communities in Nova Scotia, for instance, Nova Scotia, Canada, the town of Preston, was actually targeted as a source of social health and social problems in the media and by health officials, which were getting taken up in the media and actually reinforced through their own frames. And Nova Scotia has already had a history of its Africville community being destroyed. And being destroyed also constituted as a social public health problem, which is why in the first place it had to be taken apart, because the city chose to establish a disposable company, a chemical company, and other kinds of infectious institutions, infectious buildings and companies in the middle of Africans' livability, in the middle of their communities, thereby infecting Blacks in Nova Scotia.

And as a result, this legitimized their need to remove and to tear that town down. We see that this whole thing around social control and public health discourses are tied to the body of Black and racialized people in Indigenous people as bodies that are the dangerous, bodies are the vectors, bodies that are disposable.

In an article I penned with two of my colleagues, Rinaldo Walcott and OmiSoore Dryden in April of this year, we stated that public health has historically been an extension of policing. For Black people, that has positioned us as suspicious and nefarious in our actions and movements. In our current state of emergency, this union of policing and public health has led to more Black people being arrested, detained, and physically restrained. And during this time Black people were actually being carded, stopped. People who were walking with their families were being questioned. We had a man and his family in Ottawa who happened to be in a park, didn't realize that you couldn't be in that particular park, in that space. And when he asked why he was being stopped or why he was interrogated, he was thrown to the ground and beaten by police.

We had young Black people in Nova Scotia. We also had white individuals and society who started policing the bodies of Black people, in particular homeless people and racialized people as part of their participation implication with the state agenda to maintain whiteness as purity, and to also denigrate blackness and racialized bodies as that which is infectious and need to be severely controlled. The current rules around movement put Black people at risk, more vulnerable to intensified policing, including carding and street checks, when in public and potentially exposed to the virus at work.

But those of us Black and racialized scholars and health-care researchers and advocates, we already knew that Black and racialized frontline workers, particularly women, were being infected. Yet on April 9th, during a public conversation with the Preston community COVID-19 response team and African Nova Scotian communities, Nova Scotia's Chief Medical Officer Robert Strang said now was not the time to focus on how the social determinants of health and long-standing issues are impacting Black communities during the pandemic.

He said, we can focus on these issues later. Therefore, our lives do not matter. On April 10th, Ontario Chief Medical Health Officer David Williams said, as the province fights to contain the coronavirus, this aggregated race-based data is not necessary. While challenges were being made in articles, being written by Black community scholars and researchers on the need about this aggregated race-based data, the mainstream media was reporting about the high proportion of infections of Blacks and Latinos in the United States without making any connections to the similarity of the situations of Blacks here in Canada. The insistence of blackness, not here, but elsewhere framed through discourses of criminality, social control, surveillance, disease and death in the context of the Canadian nation continues to shape the reporting of mainstream media. The media cannot plead innocence or naivety around its reporting.

This is in itself an exercise of power. Those of us who view the news must also not be naive in assuming that the news comes to us devoid of socio-historical, political, economic, power relations, imputed, racial, gender, and cultural biases. We must begin to construct these hegemonic frames of news reporting to allow for multiple narratives and historicities to come through. For journalists that would involve examining concepts, such as subjectivity and facts, and how they're constituted within socio-historical political religions of power that are racialized, that are gendered, that are colonized.

This would insist that the lives of Indigenous peoples and racialized people are not always positioned to discourses of victim vectors, terrorists, criminal, but will insist on reporting that reveals how this nation has been constituted through white supremacy, settler colonialism, slavery, and migrant labor. This would allow again for multiple narratives of resilience, survival care, sustainability, and livable lives of marginalized communities to be centered in times of a health crisis, such as this one, the coronavirus. Thank you very much.

Adrian Harewood: Beverly, thanks so much for getting us started. I'd like to ask Ashton Lattimore to go next.

Ashton Lattimore: Thank you, Adrian. I'm really excited to be here and honoured to be on a panel with such a distinguished group of people. The perspective I bring is as a Black journalist working in the United States. Let me just start with the top line numbers. In the United States, COVID-19 is absolutely a racialized crisis. So far there have been 223,000 Americans who have died and Black and Indigenous Americans have the highest death rates in this country, with Black folks being the highest at two to three times the rate of white and Asian Americans. Last week, the CDC reported that nearly all of the children and teenagers who've died from the disease have been Black and Hispanic. So here in the United States, among pretty much all quarters of the media, the reporting has reflected those numbers. At the very least, the racialized impact of how the disease itself is moving through our population and moving through communities of colour.

But I want to look for a moment beyond the numbers and kind of zoom out to examine the larger narrative. I think to do that, it's useful to put this in context of the response to and reporting on other racialized public health crises in the United States and how they were reported on and treated by our government. Going back

to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which was largely ignored by both the government and by mainstream press in the early stages, and then largely neglected except by the Black and the queer press in the United States.

Also looking at the other large racialized crisis that the United States has faced, which was the substance abuse crisis in the 1980s around crack cocaine, which instead of being treated as a public health crisis was largely examined and responded to as a criminal justice issue and reported on as such. It was treated as a problem to be addressed by punishment rather than treatment or care in contrast to the current opioid crisis, which is our other kind of large public health crisis that we're facing right now in the United States, which is effectively a wider crisis than the crack cocaine, substance abuse, public health kind of pandemic. This has been met both in reporting and in government response with compassion and accompanied by compassionate reporting that humanizes the folks who were at the centre of that public health crisis, which examines the care and the treatment options that they need and looks at types of solutions.

It looks at the resilience of their families. Coming into that context, the COVID-19 pandemic is unique because while it is racialized in its most severe impact in the United States, the disruptions to everyone's lives, those have been felt across the board across racial and economic socioeconomic lines, although not to the same severity. So, because of that relative universality, the crisis itself has swept in the media industry and the people who make up the media industry in a way that is personal. That wasn't necessarily the case for the HIV/AIDS crisis for the crack cocaine pandemic, and other racialized public health crises. Right now, narratively, we're seeing an interesting mix of the compassionate human centred reporting, often across racial lines that we saw with the opioid epidemic.

At the same time, a lot of this hyper individualistic shame-based personal responsibility narratives showed up more heavily with HIV/AIDS and crack cocaine. That is where you're getting a lot of reporting about things like mask shaming, pre-existing conditions, blaming people for having those, blaming people for having co-morbidities that put them at greater risk of contracting and possibly dying from COVID-19.

All of those things are showing up in a racialized way. Especially a lot of the pre-existing conditions that put people at more significant risk of death or serious illness are also disproportionately affecting people of colour throughout the country. I think coming in with those narratives that the press has absolutely captured the racialized impact of the numbers of the high numbers of Black, Indigenous and people of colour who have been affected by COVID-19.

The high numbers of people who are, or of children who've been affected by it, the numbers of people who have lost their jobs. But I think what is missing in many outlets are the racialized and the gendered impacts not at the public health level, but the follow-on effects of the pandemic. This isn't just a public health crisis, it's a workers' rights crisis. It's a family care crisis and an education crisis, a crisis in gender justice, electoral justice.

We're in the middle of an election right now and criminal justice, in the United States, race intersects with all of those issues in really insidious ways that are often missed. What we've done at *Prism* is try to focus our reporting on those intersections that people who are impacted and how their multiple identities racial and otherwise are complicating this moment for them.

I can run through a couple of examples of the stories that we've been working on and the reporting we've been doing that isn't as widespread around the rest of the media. So, around workers' rights, there's been lots of discussion of essential workers, lots of reporting on essential workers, but less widespread reporting of the demographics of many of the fields that are most impacted.

When you're thinking about meat packing plants, which were some of the most dangerous places to be with widespread outbreaks around the country, particularly North Carolina, Minnesota, which are some places that we've seen significant outbreaks. These plants are largely staffed by immigrants, Black and brown immigrants, often women, many of them who are undocumented.

We've been reporting on the risks that they're facing and the risks that their families are facing by proxy, because of the workers' rights issues that are present within these places. The lack of personal protective equipment, the lack of the ability to take time off. The people close to you, where you turn out to be infected the lack of accessible testing and how that's showing up in their lives and what they're choosing to do about it, which in many cases is to speak out against the people who they're working for or against the companies who are putting them at risk in this way.

And it shows up in a similar way for farm workers who are largely Latinx people often on the West coast. We understand them as essential workers who are significant because they're putting food on the table of the rest of America, the implication being white America, but really reporting on how this is affecting them and their lives and their families. And again, what they're choosing to do about it in response.

Following on from workers' rights and getting a little bit into the gendered and racialized aspect of this, the issue of childcare workers has also been something that has been covered at a high level. There's been reporting on how the childcare crisis is affecting women broadly, with women falling out of the workforce at higher rates. By this point, I believe 800,000 women in the United States have fallen out of the workforce or been forced out of it.

I think it's a better way to describe that. But less so on how women of colour specifically are faring, given the added pressures that we're facing. And that's both women of colour who as working parents and women of colour who disproportionately make up the people who are working in the channel, the care industry who are facing job losses, closures of childcare centres and early childhood education.

And again, similar lack of personal protective equipment, lack of time off. And they are facing all of these things for essentially poverty-level wages, which has been true since before the pandemic. For working parents, Black and brown women often have lower paying jobs, less flexible jobs, more likely to live in childcare deserts even

before the pandemic, and often are more likely to be single mothers who don't have partners who can equitably split the load of childcare to reduce the impact on the mother's career, which puts the entire family at economic risk.

That's one of the ways where workers' rights, gender justice and racial justice are all intersecting in the lives of these women, whether they're working mothers, childcare workers, and many people are both, which has largely gone unreported. Turning to another big racial justice area in the United States, but certainly not the only one, there's criminal justice where we've seen our prisons and jails are largely stuffed with Black and brown people and prisons and jails are also sites that have extremely high rates of transmission.

That's one of the ways where the race impact of COVID-19 is a direct result of policies that have been in place for, I think it's fair to say, centuries, if not, at least decades of incarcerating Black and brown people at much higher rates than other people. As a result, get them warehoused in places where they're put in a grave risk of many public health crises, but this one being the most acute in this moment.

And immigrants, who are also Black and brown folks, in the United States and are in detention centres are being similarly affected, being placed at a higher risk. We're not seeing a ton of reporting about that outside of the usual quarters, like *Prism* and other outlets that focus on Black and brown people. But within the detention centres, people are now being asked to choose between being separated from their children.

Their children can leave these highly infected detention centres or stay together, but at high risk of transmission. They are a number of ways that this is showing up across the country and a huge one apart from the ones I've already mentioned is the electoral justice aspect of it. Our electoral system in the United States is highly racialized. Voter suppression was already highly racially targeted before this moment.

And what we're seeing now is that the pandemic has offered new levers of suppressing the votes of people of colour in a way that's not being reported on with quite that level of intersectionality. We're getting lots of reporting across the press about voter suppression and lots of reporting in the press about the pandemic itself and how it's reflected in communities of colour in terms of numbers, but not necessarily how those two things are intersecting, especially for Black and Indigenous people.

As I'm sure a lot of people are aware, we've largely shifted in many places to vote by mail in the United States, as a result of the pandemic for safety reasons to keep people not having to go physically to the polls, as cases are spiking around the country, in places where it might be hard to social distance, long lines, etc.

And this has been a shift that's largely been lauded in a lot of quarters, rightfully so because it's a shift that's positive for many communities, but at the same time, a story that's been missed is how for Native American communities, the widespread shift to vote by mail poses a risk because many of them have a lack of residential addresses or may live on reservations or in rural areas where the mail is not delivered or picked up in a reasonably fast way where you can trust that you're meant to receive your ballot or that your ballot is going to be received in time to be counted.

At the same time, *The New York Times* just reported that mail-in ballots that do manage to get in are already being rejected with Black and Hispanic people seeing some of the highest rates of rejection. So that's the election story lying at the intersection of COVID-19 of racial injustice in the United States, which is a really significant place where I think there's been a lack of understanding how these issues are stacking on top of each other for people of colour throughout the country.

I could go on for a while, because I'm sure there are plenty more examples, but I think the short version of it is that in the United States, the racial impact of COVID-19 is spinning out far beyond death rates and case numbers. And especially in the case of the election, our very ability to elect a government that might help us out of this crisis is being impacted in a racial way by people of colour being effectively prevented, deterred, suppressed from exercising our right to vote in a way that might actually generate some added safety for us.

I think what all of this illustrates, is the presence of all of these stories in our own reporting and the relative lack in the rest of the media, except for in other identity-based outlets. And other outlets led by people of colour really illustrate the importance of looking beyond the numbers and really lifting up the stories of how people of colour are not just being affected, passively affected, but also how we're fighting to survive, to thrive, to keep each other safe in this moment.

A lot of what that looks, some of it is, literally speaking out to the press and exposing these problems where they happen, a lot of mutual aid, there's direct action and a lot more that's happening. And that's the reporting that we've been aiming to do. I think we need to see more of that throughout the rest of the media nationally to make sure that we're not missing the full scope of the racialized impact of the pandemic. Thanks.

Adrian Harewood: Ashley, thanks so much. I'd now like to ask Danielle, to give us her presentation.

Danielle Kilgo: Thanks for being here this morning and inviting me, I'm really honoured to have this opportunity. Most of my research explores problems of media representation related to marginalized communities in the United States. And I think it's important to start with, to know about the method of my research. I'm a critical scholar at heart, but my critique of journalism is really backed by mostly quantitative empirical data.

In most cases, I count narratives or frames and news coverage to create a data set that helps me understand journalistic output, what the narratives are. And then I use surveys and interviews with journalists and audiences to make more sense of the production methods and impact on society. Most of my research has found that racism continues to have a huge systematic influence on the institution of journalism in the United States.

And it serves as a vessel for status quo protection in our larger society. Let's say, this notion really reinforces what Dr. Bane has already beautifully articulated. I have found the status quo protection in the case of coverage of anti-racism protests in the United States, coverage of police violence incidents in the United States and racialized medical crises, like the Ebola crisis and the opioid crisis.

Today's discussion about racial disparities and COVID-19 shows that the same struggle still remains. Today I just wanted to talk about a few big data trends that we can see by exploring article counts and keywords across news organizations and digital coverage. It is coming from their websites. And just as a disclaimer, this doesn't just come from mainstream news organizations. It also comes from these digital native sites like BuzzFeed news, ethnic media, alternative media and aggregators.

I use a database called Insights from news width, and it tracks just all of the unique URLs from tens of thousands of news organizations in the United States. What I did was pull coverage that was related to coronavirus and COVID-19, and I had to say it at the beginning of the article. It appeared in the headline or the first paragraph or the metadata. And from that, weeding down all of the articles that were created from January 1, until yesterday, I pulled about 5.8 million articles that were about coronavirus. That's actually 5,826,928 articles — a whole bunch. Then what I did was run a set of keywords that corresponded with the number of times, journalism articles mentioned things like racial disparities or racism generally. My research notably shows that journalism has a real problem with using these words. I also looked for a number of articles that emphasize COVID-19 and specific groups.

I ran individual searches for Black Americans and related words that we would call them Black people, African Americans, native Americans, Asian Americans, and Latin Americans. I just want to talk briefly about what those look like in raw numbers and how we can understand what the coverage looks like and peaks of time. One reminder, there are 5.8 million articles about coronavirus.

Let's start with the coverage that specifically discusses coronavirus and racism generally. So just saying that it has racism in the title, or at the beginning of the article, I retrieved 13,382 articles that we know generally include references to racism or racial disparities. That's 0.22 percent of the total articles, the most viral coverage from that 0.22 percent primarily discussed racial assaults against Asian Americans.

Here is this charted, and for each of these keywords that I used, you can see the major tipping points over time, and there's general reference to racism and COVID-19 in the green line. You'll really see two peaks that I think are telling. These peaks represent times when the keywords received the most coverage. And the first peak is this critical point of the shutdown in the United States when initial deaths are starting to be reported.

So, we've shut down. We have these initial deaths, and we're finding that people of colour are being hospitalized and dying from the virus at a much higher rate than white people. Then there's a second peak in early June. You see that in green again, and it's the highest peak that we see overall. As I went through that coverage, what I found was that it's not George Floyd's death that set the agenda, although George Floyd's murder very clearly set an agenda with the press. But this press agenda that links coronavirus with racism, again, was widely set by a wave of protesters that included doctors and nurses that said racism was also a health pandemic in the United States. I would argue that it took the secondary string of official sources and experts beyond just Black people dying from police violence and COVID-19 at a disproportionate rate.

It's that novelty of doctors stopping what they're doing and calling attention to the issue in the middle of the street and their white coats coming and making this connection that drives an uptick and coverage of racism and coronavirus. But it's not novel for long as you can see, it dies again, the attention to this issue dies again, and people continue to do so as well. Let's take a turn to look at that blue line, which includes coverage that focuses on coronavirus and Black Americans.

I just want to remind you that one in 1,000 Black people have died from coronavirus since the pandemic began in the United States. Here I retrieved 8,351 articles. That's 0.14 percent. You can see that it peaks in April. That peak represents April 6th through April 12th, which corresponds with these statistics coming out that are talking about Black people and the disproportionate loss that they're facing after we start to see the uptick in deaths.

The most viral coverage came from *USA Today*, and its headline "Black people dying from coronavirus at much higher rates in cities across the United States." We don't see a major uptake immediately after the George Floyd protest this thing about the effect on Black people. Instead, we see that this, over time, has lost its newsworthiness, and it gradually fades to those news organizations that focus on Black and brown communities. The yellow line represents the Indigenous people who are the first citizens of the United States.

I retrieved 5,217 articles of those 5.8 million. That is 0.09 percent. Here there is less coverage that we've seen before. We'll see this is the case with other race and ethnicity groups of the peaks. The first is again the initial report is of the uptick in deaths in native American communities.

And the second uptick in that yellow line followed the massive support from the Irish, from an Irish donation and from the delivery of body bags, instead of personal protective equipment to community health centres treating native Americans in Seattle. The novelty of that was what drove that uptick in coverage. Hispanics and Latinx people represent the purple line. They received even less attention at 4,732 articles, which equates to 0.08 percent.

The May 25th through the 31st peak really corresponds with headlines that are inclusive of individual hotspots in predominantly Latinx communities. The early August uptick corresponds with new data suggesting that Black and Latinx children are disproportionately contracting severe cases of COVID-19. Another narrative with novelty, because it contradicted earlier data that said children were largely spared from the disease.

Finally, if you look at the black line, which is the article count for Asian Americans coronavirus coverage, we can see the attention to the targeting and uptick of hate crimes against Asian Americans driving that brief and early March peak. That's March 16th through the 22nd. You see there when the shutdown is just happening. And for the most part, that narrative fades out although research suggests that hate crimes continued at elevated rates. Here I only retrieved 1,521 articles that's 0.03 percent.

As I look at the media outlets producing news about coronavirus in the United States, I might make this cursory conclusion that there's not enough coverage, 0.22 percent is simply not enough. And I think it's also fair to ask the question, especially

as journalism practitioners and as educators and as journalists, what *is* enough? Certainly, it should be a conversation here and in newsrooms and in journalism education and in conversations going forward.

But my takeaways from this data, when we're having that conversation, I would like to introduce two equity considerations.

The first is one that echoes the critiques you've already heard here that there's a dire need to place these narratives within more intersectional contexts and to highlight not just death rates, but also the disproportionate burdens that these communities bear. Burdens that not only elevate the death rates now that will continue to elevate the death rates in the future.

It's important to consider race in class, for example, the disproportionate number of people of colour who served in lower paying jobs and the frontlines as editor Latimer has already talked about. There's a need to think about the inadequate funding of Indigenous communities. There's a need to consider that Black people are more likely to be uninsured and suffer chronic health conditions. And that that's a product of racism and not a personal choice.

We should commit to the idea that this is also not a partisan narrative, this is the acknowledgement of human rights, and then not the denial of those rights for certain communities. In the end, maximizing these intersections and coverage will help drive home more systematic effects that a narrative that promotes the more systematic effects of racism, and de-emphasizes these narratives that focus on death and prime audiences to think of this as a genetic issue, because it is most definitely not. As I look through the data, I have one more additional concern and that's related to racist people and racist ideas. The coronavirus has offered many opportunities for us to hear about blatant racism. This includes situations where McDonald's in China banned Black people.

When a senator questioned the handwashing capabilities of people of colour. When a police officer said, it was unfortunate that more Black people didn't get the virus, with routine references to this virus in the United States as the China virus and the blaming of Hispanic labour workers for surges and Florida's cases, and not the state's decision to open in May. Power holders, especially politicians, use racism to maintain the status quo and protect their financial investments.

And because the novelty of hearing something racist, especially for journalists, or the novelty to some people, I guess that how the media plays a part in the amplification of racist ideas, which stirs conversation and public debate, typically about the debate ability of whether something is racist or not.

There's a question and a conversation to have about journalists, total empathy, or initial amplification of these power holders and the cost of that amplification. Ultimately, if the goal is to move the needle from that 0.22 percent, or if you put all these articles together and assumed that they're mutually exclusive — they're not — but if you did, for a lack of numbers, if you add all these together, you get 0.57 percent.

If we think about how we're going to move that needle, while we discuss maybe getting towards one percent or whatever arbitrary number we come up with, we have to be careful and thoughtful about the frames that we push forward. You have to be careful about not amplifying racist ideas. I would argue that we do analysts and educators and students, we have to find novelty and the tragedy of racism, we have to find novelty and the survival of racism.

And then the joy that can be found in the worlds of those affected by racism. If we're going to continue to find novelty and the tragedy that racism creates. I'll stop there. Thank you for your time.

Adrian Harewood: Danielle, thanks so much. I now would like to ask Shree if she can offer us her presentation.

Shree Paradkar: Hi everyone. Thanks so much for having me here and my God, what a tough act to follow three brilliant presentations and to try and not repeat anything that was already said. I'm just going to bring a little bit of a contextual history around Canadian media and the way it has handled racism or how it views issues of racism, before I get into this moment of coverage during the pandemic.

Mine is not an academic lens, it's an experiential lens. Some 15 years ago when I first arrived as an immigrant, but to be clear an immigrant of prior privilege, it was not at all uncommon for journalists in this country to talk about us as being post-racial. I'd hear of Toronto being boasted about as the city that people actually meant when they talked of New York, for instance, or the Statue of Liberty actually embodying what Toronto and Canada already was.

In fact, white men particularly would very commonly say to me, "Look Shree, if you and I went to the job market today for an interview, you would get the job and I wouldn't." And if that was true, 15 years ago, then I think you would see some change across sectors, at least in middle management levels, and we're not seeing that. And so, there's a lot of anecdotal fear. What I now recognize was anecdotal fragility or anecdotal fear around this idea that the other was rising and the other was getting more powerful. But I didn't recognize all of that then. About 10 years ago, you would start seeing a little bit of the beginning of the impact of social media, the amplifying of voices that had been silenced for centuries and then that amplification had increasingly had a ripple effect of increasing the assertiveness of people who were not activists, but now were inspired by the activists and had a platform to make their voices or their views known. But it was a slow start to the decade.

I would say in Toronto and in all of Canada, it was the Black Lives Matter, stopping the Pride Parade in 2016, that really shook up how we started to view racism. It really rattled the media. When Black Lives Matter stopped the parade, one of the demands was to ban police showing up in uniform at the parade. And my goodness, the hand-wringing that followed that moment. Even then if you raised the issue of whiteness in newsrooms, something that newsrooms in Canada do not share data about, the statistics or their demographics or their own staff except maybe at the public broadcaster. Editors at that time were still saying, "Well, you don't necessarily need non-white journalists, as long as you followed the principles of journalism. Maybe

you'll just miss a little bit of nuance." And I think my very first column was on this and there were tiresome discussions on, "Well, if you have journalists of colour in newsrooms, then what percentage should that be?"

But they weren't asking, "What percentage of colour should be white and why?" That wasn't ever asked. If colour didn't matter, if we were all colour blind, then how about we just make all newsrooms into all Black newsrooms? But nobody was looking at it through that lens at all. And for too long, it's been the position in a media that doesn't understand systemic racism, that thinks racism doesn't deserve coverage unless a racist incident has occurred. Even then, when such an incident occurs it is through the lens of is that even racism? I know that some of this may come from a kind of timidity, perhaps it's a hope that somebody else will call it racist. Then the journalist can actually say that, oh so-and-so said it was racist because it's such a loaded term.

But then in reality, that's not what happened when you asked, "Is something racist?" It allowed the argument to be made that something is not racist at all. And so, whether it was a prime minister, Justin Trudeau's photos appearing in blackface, whether it was the hockey commentator, Don Cherry saying, "You people." Whether it was the singer Bryan Adams referring to bat eating, wet market, animal selling, virus making, greedy bastards, it turns out that in public discourse, interpersonal racism in those situations, nobody's racist ever. This is a very comfortable position for everyone to take. We all know here that denial of racism is the default position of white supremacy because what it essentially means when people say racism doesn't exist is that they're doing better because they are better because they are superior. It is in this context that COVID happened.

Now listen, in newsrooms, we were all undergoing tremendous stress ourselves. It's not just in terms of the industry that is suffering, but also for journalists as people. We ourselves like to focus on our personal safety, juggling between family life and work life and understanding what social distancing means, trying to offer accurate coverage of our understanding of the virus itself, what its implications are, the stories of empty aisles, what's happening at the airport, trying to hold authorities to account. There is a lot going on. And what happens in a time of stress is that we fall back on what we already know and what we are comfortable with. This is not the time where we are expanding our intrinsic knowledge of social inequities, unless we are forced to.

In Canada, in my opinion, what happened was we fell victim to narratives that we were already in love with. And all of them created blind spots. One, that Canada is essentially a benign project. Two, that we are not as bad as the United States and three, that we have universal health care and therefore there cannot really be racism in health. We began with this idea that we're all in this together. And we applied our very non-intersectional lens. And I know that this has been referenced in all the presentations prior to mine.

In the early days, in February, racism was only covered in the lens in which racism is understood, which is at the interpersonal level. And that was the lens of anti-Asian racism or xenophobia. Once again, not systemic racism. And it doesn't mean that those stories shouldn't be covered, they should, but we understood it as separate

from the pandemic. When it was declared a global pandemic, who is most affected by it? We understood that to be in poor people, homeless people, but not necessarily recognizing those intersections with other identities.

Any newsrooms or Canadian newsrooms that had reporters who ordinarily paid attention to these issues around immigration, around migrant workers, around racism, they ended up at least having an ear to the ground, but there are a small handful in the total landscape.

The fact is that more than 60 percent of what makes us sick are social factors such as race and income. And meanwhile, data was flowing from the United States drawing a horrific image of COVID's devastating impact on African Americans leading to Ibram X. Kendi calling it a racial pandemic within the viral pandemic. And then here anti-racism advocates such as Beverly and migrant rights advocates and health advocates were agitating that we have this data in Canada, but that was met with resistance. In April, Ontario's chief medical officer, Dr. David Williams said, "No, this kind of data isn't necessary because the main high-risk groups of COVID are the elderly, people with weakened immune systems and those with very particular comorbidities." And then he said that regardless of race Ontario's government treats everybody equally.

There was, once again, this refusal to accept that systemic racism exists. And yet in 2016, the same government had a report on health inequities. This was authored by the same Dr. David Williams, which highlighted the role of factors such as race and income in determining health. In this report, it notes the importance of data to understand these health inequities. This was in 2016. What about universal health care? Ontario's advocates had already managed to open in our OHIP system, which is Ontario's health-care system for all people, regardless of their immigration status. But what's true in policy is not necessarily true in practice. The prominent health advocate, Angela Robertson, told me back in April that she heard that people were turning up at emergency departments and being asked to pay \$500 per treatment if they were not documented.

There was so much push from advocates from societal pressure, that once we began collecting data, that's when we found some of what you referred to earlier Adrian about 83 percent of COVID-impacted people in this in Toronto were BIPOC. And by the way, obviously medical racism wasn't the only way that Black and poor racialized people were hit. There was this whole other aspect of the pandemic, which was policing and policing by the society, and policing by society by police. The idea of who belongs unquestioningly to a public space was forced into our mainstream discussion, perhaps best by the Canadian Amy Cooper in New York who threatened to call the cops on a birdwatcher because he had the temerity to ask her to put her dog on a leash in an on-leash park.

That happened in the United States, but then there were also two incidents in Ottawa. In March 2017, there was 17-year-old Styles Lepage who went out for a walk in his suburban Barrhaven neighbourhood. Pandemic rules around what was open, what was off limits was unclear at that point. And there were no signs posted in any parks. But he figured to be safe he didn't want to be near crowds. So, he steered clear off three school grounds near his house and walked until he found a public park

where he could shoot a few hoops by himself. But then an Ottawa school trustee, she berated him. She wanted him to leave and he said, "I refuse to leave. Why should I leave?" And there were other people playing soccer nearby who were not asked to leave.

Then there was another incident again in Ottawa, in April, where a Black man who was accompanied by his seven-year-old daughter, were filing out of a park after a by-law officer asked everyone to leave. But then he was the one singled out, fined \$2,010 and punched in the face for refusing to give his name. This led to policing the pandemic. A map that tracks all of these incidents, not this particular incident, it led to Policing the Pandemic, which is the map that tracks criminal charges across the country being created by criminology academics from the University of Ottawa and the University of Toronto. And surprise, surprise, they found that the enforcement disproportionately targets Black, Indigenous and racialized Canadians. We were, as the Canadian Civil Liberties Association called it, in the middle of an ugly ticketing pandemic.

It was only after George Floyd's death in the United States, again, when something specifically racist had happened that the mainstream conversation, perhaps tired of COVID, focused on racism. Societal pressure at that point from activists, forced media, which was once again focusing on the spectacular grotesqueness down south, to recognize and acknowledge police brutality here. With the deaths of Regis Korchinski-Paquet, Elishia Hudson, Chantel Moore, D'Andre Campbell, Ejaz Choudry and so many others.

Then doctors were, at the same time, starting to talk about racism as a public health crisis. A combination of all of this finally led the media to having a glimmer of understanding of the face of systemic racism. Yet again, the framing went back to, you guessed it, does systemic racism exist? It allowed politicians like the Quebec Premier François Legault who are legally allowed to say, "No, no, it doesn't exist." To round this off in the total media context in which I'm speaking, it was in the middle of this, a global pandemic and crimes unignorable that something else happened. Which is, that a number of Black, Indigenous and racialized journalists began to come forward to speak of their experiences in newsrooms. It took all of this to happen for Canadian media to recognize that the moment had come at last for it to commit to changes or to be judged harshly by history. What they're doing about it is a whole different discussion. I'll just leave it at that for now.

Adrian Harewood: Thank you so much for that and I think I'm just going to start by posing a question Shree, both to you and also Beverly because you both touched on this notion of Canadians being committed to a kind of an innocence project. Also, Bev, you emphasize this tendency in Canada to see Blackness as being an American phenomenon that there is this kind of invisibility of Blackness. I'm wondering what would it mean if we were to change the frame in this country? Were we to rid ourselves of this commitment to the innocent project, and if we were able to see the presence of Blackness, what would be the implications do you think for our journalism and for the media in Canada?

Beverly Bain: I don't think you can just move from the way in which your entire structure of journalists of journalism is set up to just doing that. I think you have to look at your

structure in terms of how journalism is actually created. Because it is created along some very clear frames that, I would say, the way that objectivity and facts work within a range of such discourses of universality, of exoneration, of whitewashing. All of these things, shape journalism as it is. These frames continue to be frames that you use in your journalist schools because I've spoken to some students in journalism, and that's the frame they work from. It was only recently that I think Ryerson fought really hard to get a course, one course that actually centres on racism.

How do we then start thinking about race and racism as a fundamental issue within Canadian society so that as journalists we learn to speak to these issues based on the fact that racism does exist in this country? This is only one course, this is not the framing of journalism schools. Journalist schools are very privileged, and journalists are seen as a privileged group, as a group with a lot of power because they provide information and people sit in front of their television set more so during the coronavirus than probably in recent times because we were on lockdown and relied on what was coming from the television set, from the radio, from social media platforms as the truth, the facts. I think it's critical that you start with reframing how journalism functions, so that you start creating an area of work that actually shapes its universalism, its dichotomy to include multiple narratives.

I think power has to be shifted in other words. Power has to be more than power that is systemic, that is repressive top-down, and there has to be room for multiple narratives. If reporters start reporting from the basis of that, there will be more narratives. The narratives should not only come from the state or a particular individual who holds a particular power or who we think actually has the information because media institutions are very much based, very structured within capitalism, and within a capitalist racialized logic. When reporters report, they want to hear from who they think the expert are. They want to hear from who the leaders are. They want to hear from who the professionals are. And unusually these individuals are not those who funnel information that is about the people. In fact, they're there to maintain a particular kind of discourse, one that continue to appeal to a particular kind of state and systemic inequalities.

I think it's really critical to start challenging your own intellectual foundational canon of scholarship and how the school of journalism actually thinks and practices journalism, so that there's room for multiple narratives, so that the only time when any inkling of the realities of Black people were coming through, is when those of us were writing in alternative medias, alternative platforms, we were not writing in the main media. One of the few reporters that I know who was covering from the voice of racialized people was Shree, in *The Toronto Star*. Other than that, you weren't getting that perspective. What you were getting, was the perspective of a white media universalizing whiteness and a particular discourse.

It wasn't until we started saying, this is happening. Then it entered the frame and entered the mainstream as Blacks are now wanting disaggregated data. And now that they're wanting this disaggregated data, the question would become, everybody wants their own data. They were saying these things, and I'm thinking, "And so what, if that is the case? What's the problem here?" They are many lives and they are many experiences.

Adrian Harewood: And the idea is, what makes you so special?

Beverly Bain: Well, no, but that was it. Like why? And I'm thinking, "But there's data on white men, there's data on white women, there is data on seniors and the majority happen to be white people." I want to be really clear about data and the collection of data. Because in these political times, data has always been a fraught area for Black, racialized and Indigenous people. Because data has been used against us when it is in the hands of the state and other state professionals. It's been used to target, not to actually create sustainable policies and programs and support for communities that are disenfranchised.

It's been used as a way to surveil, which is why the Black community in Canada has always been particular about data being collected on Blackness. And particularly data collected by police. Because it has always been turned against us. I know I'm talking a lot, but I just wanted to say that data is not that clear either, but I don't think we were asking for data simply so that we can have numbers, but we were asking simply for the purposes of pinning down the way in which diseases and viruses like the coronavirus, as Ashton mentioned, similar to how the AIDS virus actually impacted Black people. And we didn't know here in Canada that we were getting information on how it was impacting white gays and white queers, but white gay men have to actually collect their own data in order to actually start talking about how it was affecting the Black community. I'll stop there.

Adrian Harewood: Thank you so much for that, Beverly because I wanted to follow with Shree. What would it mean if Canadian media were to adopt something I'm going to call the Bain doctrine, the Bain agenda of adopting multiple narratives and changing the frame, what would it mean then for the coverage of this COVID-19 crisis? As someone who works in the newsroom, how could you imagine, the way in which we tell these stories changing, if we were to adopt this kind of doctrine?

Shree Paradkar: That's a good question. And a practical one. The first thing that would have to change is that framework of amplifying an institutional point of view and looking at institutions as the experts on lived lives. The first thing that would happen is we would view, unless it was data that was collected by institutions and unless it was data collected with integrity, by institutions and owned by the people who are affected. We would say, "The institution says this, but this is what the people say as well." And that would be the balance we would be looking for. Not so-and-so says racism exists, but so-and-so says racism doesn't exist. We would go away from that idea of does it exist? To now start fine-tuning all the different ways in which it is affecting us and what we can do to what policies, what are actual actions we can take to overcome it?

I am a firm believer that in all sectors, including in journalism, no change is possible unless all of us view ourselves as individuals, as sites of change. First, sites of change and learning introspection, viewing our own identities in relation to the identities of people around us, taking an absolutely unflinching gaze at the privileges that we have relative to somebody who doesn't and what all those intersections are and carrying that identity with you to every interview. I you're a white male or a white female cisgender and able-bodied, then you go in understanding that privilege and understanding and the responsibility of that privilege also means when

you're asking questions. And it even is just simply knowing that level of awareness will change how you approach stories. We should ideally cut away then that white saviourism and to be able to respect the resistance, the fight back that's coming from communities, and to give them the space, and to give them the voice, and to get yourself out of the equation. It's not so much about you the journalist, "I'm going to allow you guys to speak." It is more, "Here is my platform and these are all the changes. And this is how we'll hold people accountable."

It is not to say that we give up our journalistic values of either holding people accountable, of actually testing evidence. We are not stenographers to either institutions or to activists. Everybody has to be held accountable, but we have to do it fairly. Even things known to police, question what police mean when they say, "Oh, so and so is known to police." Don't just assume, don't just speak in codes and say that if somebody is known to police it means they are not worth covering, or it means that they deserve what happened to them. So just one simple example here.

Adrian Harewood: Danielle and Ashton, we know that African Americans, Black Americans constitute about 14 percent of the US population. Danielle, you said quite an astonishing figure. I think you gathered all of this data and you found that just 0.22 percent of the stories that had been told about coronavirus have been told about the plight or the challenges of Black Americans.

And Ashton, you cited the fact that at prison you have been very intentional in the way in which you've been telling stories around COVID. But you notice that so many of the stories that you are exposing, some of the stories that you are telling are not being told in the mainstream media. I guess the question is who is the mainstream media? Who is news for in the mainstream media? What does this tell us about the function of news? And I'll ask Danielle first.

Danielle Kilgo: Well, I mean news has always been for the majority, which has always been assumed to be white people. It's always a capitalistic entity, it is there to make money. And despite the fact that we have ethical clauses especially in the mainstream that try to write specific norms and routines and practices for journalists. In the end, these norms, the underwriting of them are institutionalized in a system that is thinking about capitalism, that is rooted in racism and is rooted in patriarchy. I don't think we can avoid that idea. The mainstream pledges allegiance to these foundations. And I think that we have a bunch of media organizations, both ethnic media that have a huge century-long history of committing to a different cause to saying, "People over everything. People over money." And they committed to pleading the cause of people who were not represented in that space.

Not only ethnic media does this alternative media which has a double-edged sword, it also takes a stance and says, "I've stepped away from objectivity," and pledges allegiance to some specific idea or topic or ideological stance and then decides to report from that, a new revised form of objectivity that centres a particular issue. There's not always a win with that, especially as we think about the fake news media and the very polarized far right media that comes out of the United States now. But those models are ones that take the capitalistic entity in some cases and place and set an ideological stance that's important at its core. I think that having newsrooms that are dedicated to that ideological stance is a lot like having newsrooms that

dedicate themselves to objectivity and that the prestige that accompanies it and follows it is unique, and it is palpable in newsrooms that do that.

Adrian Harewood: But Danielle are these institutions or these media organizations, are they reformable or are they basically functioning the way they have always functioned, so that the way in which they're functioning is not a mistake and they're just carrying out their particular project and perhaps there's no way of changing them?

Danielle Kilgo: No. I mean, I'm doing trainings in newsrooms now. I don't think there's no way of changing them. I think that there just has to be constant pressure to change them. It's hard to keep in an institution that's based on ideals that these are challenging, it's hard to keep that idea centre. A lot of times we said, "Well, journalists do this." There's a lot of mindful journalists in the mainstream that know what they're doing, that know how to talk about racism, and that know how to talk about racists. And they can't find their place either because they're not represented adequately in their newsrooms, or because their editors are editing out these things that they find non-essential. We find the editors have a problem. You keep stepping up the ladder there's all kinds of problems that are not just journalists, but we talk about journalists to lie.

I think that yes, newsrooms can be reformed but a whole collective newsroom has to say, "We" at every single level, not just at the journalist level, not at the lowest level technically of our administrative spaces. We are not just going to make them responsible for making this happen. We as a collective entity, we as a group have to make it happen. I do think reform can happen.

Adrian Harewood: Ashton, you talked about all the unique ways in which you were telling the story of COVID-19, the really fascinating angles, and it makes me wonder what are the questions then that your colleagues in other parts of the media are not asking that prevent them from engaging in the kind of project that you're engaged in? What's preventing them from finding the angles that you're finding?

Ashton Lattimore: I think it's actually a great deal of what Danielle pointed out, which is that even if a reporter and many reporters do at many legacy outlets have the wherewithal, and the knowledge, and the nuance to be asking these key questions. If that's not the way that their editors think about things, if that's not the way that the people at the top, their publisher, might think about who their audience is or what's in their organization's wheelhouse, then even if they are asking those questions, those are not going to show up in the stories because the stories won't be assigned, or the context will be edited out of them.

Some of the key questions that I think are missing are first, who are these stories for? A lot of this is an audience question and many outlets write with a presumed white gaze as to who they imagine their reader to be, and it comes across in a way that flattens communities. It flattens people into one thing. It flattens workers into workers, and it doesn't allow you to disaggregate them into how is this affecting Latino workers? How is this affecting Black and brown childcare workers? I think just asking how people's multiple identities are intersecting with each other and complicating one another in this moment, I think is a question that's not being asked enough. Very often in service of the kind of universality that I'm seeing in a lot of

the stories, I think that Beverly has brought up and Shree as well, just this idea that we're all in this together so it's all affecting us, even in some individualized pockets affecting those pockets the same way.

A lot of the stories that have been about women writ large, if you look more closely at them, they're actually about middle-class white women and the problems that they're facing because it's hard to work from home with your kids at home with you on Zoom. That has nothing to do with the challenges being faced by a Black woman who is a housekeeper at a university and is put at risk of COVID because the university is open and it shouldn't be, and there are students running around everywhere, and now she has to put her children at risk every day. Just being willing to hold the idea that even when you think you're breaking things down into meaningful categories for women, Black people, LGBTQ folks, there are many, many more layers that are deserving of examination. And there are many, many more layers to the way that people are being affected and the way that they're showing up for themselves and their communities.

Adrian Harewood: Beverly, we have a question here from the audience. It's Randy Boswell and he says, and I'm just going to quote him here, he says, the Derek Sloan-Dr. Theresa Tam incident was raised. Of course, Dr. Theresa Tam is the Medical Officer of Health for Canada who Beverly cited in her presentation. "The Canadian mainstream news framed Conservative MP Derek Sloan's questioning of Dr. Theresa Tam's loyalty to Canada as an absolute outrage, and that his party slow and incomplete condemnation of Sloan only aggravated the outrage. Obviously Canadian news media outlets have much more to do to improve their coverage of BiPOC communities, and to sharply increase the representation of racialized communities within their newsrooms. What else should mainstream news organizations have done in response to the Sloan-Tam debacle? Was there a failure in that moment to fully connect the controversy to systemic racism?"

Beverly Bain: So yes, absolutely. I think it was a missed opportunity. I think what was done is that there was a making over of Dr. Tam rather than an intervention that says that we have to actually acknowledge where this is coming from. And that maybe we need to also pay attention to the way in which we are actually talking about the coronavirus and its link to China. The way in which this conversation was taking place was an insistence that none of the other countries bore any responsibility. That this was centrally China's fault and as a result, that became the wallowing discourse.

They made her over in the process so that she can be rescued, but not that the issue around the fact that she was actually being framed within this Yellow Peril discourse. Instead, she had to be rescued as someone who actually slipped up, someone who actually showed or revealed her weakness, and weakness in the context of how that impacts government and the Liberal party and the nation. Therefore, she had to be made over. In some way it became incumbent on her to prove that she was committed to the state, committed this country, committed to this nation.

And that was part of the remaking of her when there was a big interview that was done. It was done at CBC by Rosemary Barton, if I'm not mistaken. As a result, that whole process was you had to show that you put Canada first. I think again, it moved to re-frame and restructure the white universalism of this country the media did

rather than at that point start challenging the way in which we were talking about the coronavirus in the context of a Yellow Peril. Which also allowed for a lot of attacks on Asians in this country that was connected to that discourse of the Yellow Peril and the fundamental anti-Asianist racism that frames the nation.

Adrian Harewood: This question is for Ashton and Danielle. Bev has mentioned the Yellow Peril discourse and I'm wondering if in the mainstream media, whether we have not covered the kind of material effect of that discourse on communities enough. I was noticing that just yesterday in *USA Today*, they revealed that in San Francisco, 38 percent of those people who have contracted the coronavirus are from the Chinese community, Chinese American communities. It's an astonishing number. There's a tendency to see Asian communities in this state, Asian Americans, Chinese Americans, as being part of this model minority. There's this model minority myth that the fact is that these communities are much more layered and heterogeneous than they are presented. But the fact that there's been this constant drum beat, this constant talk about this Chinese virus, it's resulting in a lot of Chinese Americans not getting tested. They're not getting tested because they're afraid of the stigma of going to get tested. And it doesn't seem as if these stories have emerged as much as maybe they should have in our media.

Danielle Kilgo: I mean my data would support that. I would say that we have not paid enough attention to Asian American communities in the United States. And that the small uptake that we did see was at the initial beginning of the pandemic when there was a rise in hate crimes against these particular minorities, again, sort of triggering what Shree has talked about. This has to be a racist incident to talk about it and model minorities they don't face those racist incidents in the same way that are discussed with other people who are other groups of colour. My short answer would be, no, it's not covered enough.

Adrian Harewood: Ashton?

Ashton Lattimore: I would have to agree with that and it's interesting tying it back to the need for a racist incident. We have them all the time though here in the United States. The president himself is a walking, talking racist incident against Asian-American people. Even in the debate last night, he persists in calling this the China virus and blaming China for it, which is the very same rhetoric that whipped up the stigma against Asian-American folks in the first place, which is contributing to their unwillingness or their reticence to get tested.

I think even being willing to recognize a racist incident against a model minority or supposed model minority when we see and hear one, is something that might be missing in a lot of quarters because I think it gets framed in some ways as xenophobia, which it is, but it has material effects on Chinese-American folks and other Asian-American folks from other communities in the United States as well, because people aren't always making those distinctions when they're being racist or putting stigma onto people. Being willing to call out those incidents when they occur, and then look at the follow-on effects of them is something that is missing particularly with Asian-American communities.

Adrian Harewood: Shree, you've been nodding your head which leads me to believe that you have something to add. You have something to contribute.

- Shree Paradkar:** Not to this. Absolutely there is anti-Asian xenophobia. I do think that in the case of Sloan and Tam, the problem with the way the media looks at it is it's a Conservative man saying this and therefore Conservatives are racist, but it doesn't matter who is racist, it doesn't matter. That is how all of society is seeing it. You could be Liberal and you could be a left-wing guy who's a white guy, and then you could still be having those opinions. It's not a political position that one is racist, but I think it was converted into that which is problematic.
- Adrian Harewood:** Now, this is just a general question and we're going to be wrapping up very soon, but what are the dangers of seeing racialized communities as a monolithic group? Perhaps I can start with you, Danielle.
- Danielle Kilgo:** There's so many different perspectives and experiences. I mean just intersectionally thinking about do Black women experience the same thing as Black men? The answer is most definitely no. The way we experience being able to get sick, the way we experience having to take care of those people, our caregiving duties are different. Thinking about how Black Americans are affected without thinking about these intersectional spaces erases at least one of those perspectives, whichever one is giving more privilege.
- I think that the real danger is the erasure of certain subsets within a community. And I think that because we continue to think of like people with the same colour skin as a community, not that we don't have merging identities, not that we don't share a common struggle, but the idea that we are one succinct community that articulate something in the same way, that it continues to just be a part of an eraser that doesn't allow us to understand the intersecting identities that are increasingly complicated in our modern world.
- Adrian Harewood:** Beverly.
- Beverly Bain:** Danielle pretty much covered it and I think Ashton in her conversation when she was also talking about intersectionalities. And I think one of the major things we know already that Black communities are not homogenous. And we know that there are multi-intersections for Black people, but one of the things that I think has become really significant also around the coronavirus is that there is a certain kind of coalescing around Blackness that also drains it technically on the implications for queer communities. Queer and lesbian and trans communities who are Black in terms of what this means in terms of the coronavirus and what is happening with those communities. Because even in our conversation and I work at the intersection of gender and sexuality, so even in our conversation while we are speaking about gender and we're also speaking about the impact of the coronavirus for queers, trans women and LGBT women that falls off.
- In fact, we know that this particular community is more at risk because there are actually communities that are also experiencing daily violence. Trans women are dying at a fast pace, Black trans women in particular are disappearing within all of this. We see how dangerous it is if we are coalescing Blackness around a monolith. But it's really important why multiple narratives have to always populate because this is what happened, these aspects of our lives and of our communities get hidden, even as some of us attempt to actually talk about the context for Black people and Black women in the context of the coronavirus.

Adrian Harewood: Ashton can you add to that?

Ashton Lattimore: Yes. I think one of the most important things to keep top of mind when questioning the danger of treating communities as a monolith is recognizing the power of what journalism is and what it can do. It doesn't just reflect the world around us, it's not just us observing things and telling the truth. Journalism also moves people to action. It also shapes policy. It also informs people's understanding of the world, understanding of what's possible and what's necessary. If we're reporting on communities as a monolith and we're missing the needs of Black women, we're missing the needs of gay, trans, lesbian, Latinx folks. We're missing the needs of Asian-American communities who aren't from East Asia, we're missing the needs of immigrants who aren't Latinx, but who are Black immigrants. You're missing a whole set of stories about the things people are doing about what's needed in their communities, what's possible in their communities. You're fundamentally stunting the growth of our society and the growth of the way that we think about ourselves if you're not accurately reflecting on all of the nuances and different folks within these communities that we're talking about.

Adrian Harewood: And finally, Shree.

Shree Paradkar: Very quickly, I think it's very much in the interest of a white supremacist project to consider all BIPOC people as a monolith, because then when there is a difference in opinion, and you might have a Black conservative or you might have a model minority who might dispute aspects of racism, that it allows power or whiteness to say that, "See, this person says it doesn't exist therefore, it doesn't exist." It allows that move to innocence once again.

Adrian Harewood: On that note I think it brings us to the end of this session. Thank you all so much. Thank you very much for you for your contributions this morning. And thank you also to the organizers of this conference for bringing us together, allowing us to have this very vigorous, enlightening, incisive conversation.



JOURNALISM IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

THE MEDICAL SPECIALISTS

PANEL

Moderator: Sarah Everts, Carleton University

Speakers: Vik Adhopia, CBC News; Helen Branswell, STAT News; Dr. Brian Goldman, CBC;
Carly Weeks, *The Globe and Mail*

Sarah Everts: Hello everyone and welcome to this panel on medical specialists in the Journalism in the Time of Crisis conference. I am Sarah Everts. I'm the science chair here at Carleton University and I am absolutely delighted by our panel today. We have Helen Branswell, senior writer at STAT News, Carly Weeks, *The Globe and Mail's* health reporter, Dr. Brian Goldman, radio host and podcaster for *White Coat, Black Art* and *The Dose*, and we may be joined by Vik Adhopia, CBC's health reporter, if he manages to find a moment amid the COVID fire hose of information to join the panel today. Just one bit of housekeeping before we get going. If you have any questions for the panellists, please feel free to add them in the Q&A box.

Welcome everyone. I would love to start with a bit of a round robin going through to each of the panellists to discuss your perspectives and your experiences covering the COVID crisis. I'd like to start with Helen, who was one of the first journalists, if not the first journalist, to raise the alarm about COVID-19 back in December 2019. Any perspectives, any experiences over the last 10 months?

Helen Branswell: So many experiences over the last 10 months! It's been a very long year. I am fully convinced that 2020 is my least favourite year ever. I covered SARS back in 2003, I used to work for the Canadian Press and I was based in Toronto and I was relatively recently a health reporter. I was just about three years into it, which is not that long for somebody who had no background in health reporting and I was really learning the ropes. And it was certainly the first time that I ever tried to report on a disease outbreak, let alone an emerging disease outbreak. It was fascinating. I really learned so much and it set me up well to be able to cover this one, but SARS two is not nearly as fascinating. Well, it is fascinating, but it's much, much more of a pain in the neck than SARS one was and it's going to be with us for a lot longer.

Sarah Everts: Thanks for that. Carly, how about you?

Carly Weeks: It's been, as Helen said first of all, an honour just to be here, and to follow up after Helen is never easy and she's been doing so great. We're so proud of you here in Canada, just so you know.

Helen Branswell: Oh, thank you.

Carly Weeks: I would like to say to everyone this is one of the most, or the most challenging year, I think for everybody in a lot of ways, but the world of the health journalist has certainly been turned upside down and it's been a really, really a wild ride. Very early on, I think my first byline about COVID-19, which we call the novel coronavirus, was around January 22nd when we first were hearing that this is definitely transmitting between humans. Since then, it's obviously just gone haywire.

I think that in a lot of ways the health journalists who are following this closely were a couple of weeks ahead of where everyone else was. We were saying, "We sense that this is going to be a lot bigger, that there might be more... A lockdown is coming." And we could see this happening before a lot of the politicians and elected officials really got on board. We all can remember that sort of infamous day when the pandemic was finally declared. The same day the NBA cancelled its season, Justin Trudeau's wife tested positive. And I think that was the same week at *The Globe* the health team said, "We're all heading home, pack up your things." André Picard wrote

his now infamous column, “Shut It Down,” and I think that ended up being one of the most highly read stories ever on *The Globe and Mail* website.

From then on in, we all know how it went. We’re all working from home now and from the health journalist perspective, personally, I was pregnant at the time with this little lady who’s now two months old, with a toddler at home, and so I was one of the many who was juggling work and family life, and so that was difficult. We quickly retooled our resources and tried to figure out how to hit the ground running covering COVID. We would have morning team meetings, which we had never done before. Every morning, and this is still happening, the health team meets virtually to discuss what’s going on, what are the priorities, because one of the things that strikes me most is that we were in charge of writing the biggest story of our lifetime without really knowing what was happening.

And people like Helen, who’ve been writing about infectious disease for years, have the advantage of knowing a lot more than some of us. Even though I’m a health reporter and I’ve been doing this for 10, 15 years, I did not have nearly the knowledge that I do now when it comes to some of these the issues with COVID-19. We didn’t know early on that long-term care was going to be the story in Canada. We all knew there were problems in long-term care. We had to basically adjust and adapt as the story was unfolding.

When you’re trying to hold the government’s feet to the fire and you’re not even sure what questions to be asking or what the issues are and what are we missing? We came late to the party in some ways, with the long-term care crisis, and then also the racialized disproportionate impact on racialized communities in areas such as Toronto and Montreal that have been hit really hard. And that continues to unfold today. What I see happening now with the second wave, unlike the first wave when we’re all in it together, everyone agreed we had to shut things down. Now, no one wants to, or half the population doesn’t want to shut things down and say, “This is overblown.” My hometown in northern Ontario has had very few cases and I see a lot of people on social media saying, “This whole thing was fake news and it’s been blown out of proportion and we’re not shutting things down again.”

And then you talk to people who have lost family members, who are going out to work every day and putting themselves at risk of this horrible virus and getting very sick and dying. There was such a disconnect there, and I think public health is not reaching and not delivering the messages that needs to be delivered quite frankly, of how serious this threat is. And that yes, most people will be fine, but there’s a subset that won’t, and they are being hit very hard once again. A couple of other thoughts. There’s a lot of fake news coming out, and I hate to use that word, but we are seeing tons it. I think we’re going to talk a little bit about pre-prints coming out. This researcher has a new paper, that researcher has a new paper. What do you cover? How do you even decide right now?

There’s so much disinformation being spread on social media. For me personally, that is one of the biggest threats right now, that people can choose their own adventure. You go on Facebook, you decide what you want to believe based on the groups that you belong to and the friends that you have. You can find a news story,

whether it's a legitimate news story or not, that aligns with your beliefs now and that is really scary. We've seen this for years with the anti-vaccination groups and the warnings from people about why anti-vaccination threats need to be taken seriously. And we're living that now. We're in big trouble because of the disinformation that's online and we're not nearly as well prepared as we need to be to deal with it.

I'll just end by saying I'm now observing the news that's coming out and even though I'm still kind of observing perhaps a little bit too closely now that I'm on maternity leave, I do find the messaging very unclear. Are you getting together with family at Thanksgiving? Well, you shouldn't be. But your kids can go to school with 30 other students, and you can go to a bar with your friends, and your kids can now go to dance class in Ontario. I live in Ontario, so that's the perspective I come from. Very mixed messaging and no wonder the public is confused and doesn't know what to think.

Sarah Everts: Thanks Carly. Hi, Vik.

Vik Adhopia: Hi there.

Sarah Everts: I'm really glad that you are able to join us. We're doing a round robin, just sharing everybody's perspectives and experiences. Since I'm speaking to you, let's go with you and then end with Brian. So Vik, how have the last 10 months been for you? Any sort of big picture experiences or perspectives you'd like to share for covering the coronavirus?

Vik Adhopia: I've been reporting on this almost exclusively since January 20th and I've been a health reporter for five years now, although I've done health stories wherever I've worked in the country. And I didn't live in Toronto during the time of SARS. I was in Vancouver as a local reporter there. It wasn't as huge an outbreak there. I didn't really know what to expect and I think I was maybe a bit optimistic that somehow it just would not reach Canada. I remember one of our great colleagues, Kelly Crowe, who retired this summer, we have this wall in the office of different pictures of staff members in the health unit, and we wrote this quote down of hers on a sticky note. It's from February 5th, "In two weeks this will either be all over or all over us."

Man, was she right. She retired at a good time. Like a lot of what Carly said, I honestly didn't know what to expect or know what questions to ask. I think what really struck me was when you look at countries like Taiwan or the United Kingdom and how they manage what their message is and their data gathering, our multi-level approach, the delivery of health care was a real impediment in so many ways here. Whether it's the messaging, whether it's data collection or rules that are in place. I think that was a challenge. You have Dr. Theresa Tam, well respected, saying, "It's safe to trick or treat." Then in Ontario, "No, it's not safe in these cities." I think it's just the challenge of the country we live in where our provinces and our health-care systems, they have similarities, there are some real differences, there are different views and takes on things.

So much of it is politicized, if you look at Alberta and the approach they're taking or the United States. When you're trying to tell a national story, that becomes a huge challenge because what do you say? You can really only focus on the provinces are places where it's most active. The disinformation and misinformation, it's infuriating.

I've long covered that even before COVID-19, the sort of debunking stories. They're kind of easy to do, but people want to believe what they believe. I actually had a family friend message me in WhatsApp a list of things you can do or foods you can eat and drinks you can have to prevent you from getting COVID-19.

His daughter was actually a chief surgeon in a hospital. But that's just the way it is. People are just forwarding junk and garbage and random articles. And it's stressful when you're trying to boil it down and try to get to the truth, to reflect all parts of the country. The added challenge of broadcast is you're trying to do all of this in two minutes and make it interesting and visually interesting. The thing with doing health reporting in general for broadcast is there's this oxymoron where you're trying to find a patient or a character that you use to tell your story. The thing you learn in covering science and health studies and research is that the experience of one patient is not going to be typical necessarily.

So, you're already starting in this kind of dicey position where you want to tell a story based on one person, but you have to quickly contextualize it and put all those caveats in there and remind your audience that this is what the science says, this is what the medical consensus is. That's an extra challenge, especially when something's online, like an online article. If you miss something, you can go back and look at it. You can't do that with broadcast for the most part. Just trying to get that clarity and depth and context and make it engaging all in one shot has been a real challenge with this, especially this fear of all stories starting to look the same. That's another problem.

Sarah Everts: Absolutely. Brian?

Dr. Brian Goldman: Sarah, first of all, thanks. It's a pleasure to be on this illustrious panel and speaking last, or at least in this round robin, gives me an opportunity to shout out Helen for the amazing work she's done since the very beginning. Like Helen, I was in Toronto during SARS and I would agree with her that this current coronavirus, COVID-19, is nothing like what we saw with SARS, which was primarily an outbreak among health-care professionals. Also, I want to shout out to Carly who's done some great work. Vik as well. And then countless other journalists, Kelly Grant, Jennifer Yang, Jennifer Pagliaro, without whom we would not have the context and dive into trying to figure out what's going on with the pandemic. And that's a reminder, that with journalism under threat, with concentration of journalism and the economic case becoming more and more precarious, it's just so important that we have independent sources of information, notwithstanding all the difficulties we are having trying to report the truth when it comes to the coronavirus.

As far as how our work has changed at *White Coat, Black Art*, our show has always been about the patient experience and the culture of modern medicine. We had lots of shows on racism in health care, sexism in health care, queue jumping, all kinds of topics. And the heartbeat of *White Coat, Black Art* is to tell stories. Last year, for instance, one story that comes to mind, we told a story about women with dense breasts finding out after the fact that dense breast tissue hides cancers, and so they would be diagnosed with cancer even though they had so-called clean mammograms. That story helped to spur the provinces into notifying women when they have dense breast tissue and that they should talk to their doctors about how accurate a mammogram would be under those circumstances.

Well, not surprisingly, the pandemic arrived and we completely pivoted to COVID-19. I have no regrets about that. Although, it's amazing how all the other health-care stories have been completely pushed to the side because of COVID-19. Thinking about Theresa Boyle and that massive investigative piece that *The Toronto Star* did just a few weeks ago on chronic pain doctors and these block docs who do these expensive procedures that may or may not be of value. Certainly anecdotally, patients think it's valuable, but they seem to consume a lot of health-care dollars. It's really important to keep doing those kinds of stories but so hard to do those in the middle of a pandemic. Like everybody else, we made a tactical decision to pivot to COVID-19 and, again, we focused on stories that are the heartbeat of our show.

For instance, we focused on seniors in long-term care who had no visitors for months, what was happening to them. And we focused on family members who wanted to be able to be at the bedside of people of loved ones in hospital and in long-term care but couldn't. We did stories about people who come from disadvantaged communities, particularly people with disabilities, people who come from racialized neighbourhoods and disadvantaged socioeconomically as well. In addition to that, we don't provide news you can use on *White Coat, Black Art*. Fortunately for us, we developed a companion show called *The Dose*. That show is designed to provide exactly the polar opposite. It's news you can use, it's meant to answer questions that listeners have, and they submit questions all the time.

Again, we pivoted to the coronavirus, and this week we had a show on what to do during Halloween. The programs that we do are very, very practical when it comes to that. And again, I want to shout out the team of producers that I have the privilege of working with: Dawna Dingwall, Jeff Goodes, Sujata Berry, our digital team, Ruby Buize, Brandie Weikle our frequent writer, and Nicole Ireland who is with CBC health news and divides her time between that. Between all of that, we're trying to cover the landscape. I want to leave lots of time for questions, but some of the things that we've learned from nearly a year of pandemic reporting, Carly talked about a lot of them and set us up at the beginning.

Numbers, I guess. The first lesson I would say is that numbers don't lie, but they need context. For instance, case counts are misleading, but the testing isn't targeted. Case numbers can be very misleading when the testing isn't targeted to populations at risk. The facts of the story change, we have to report the changes and condition our audiences to expect changes as we learn more about the coronavirus. Another point I want to say is that I used to say that health literacy was poor among Canadians, and then COVID came, and it made me completely rethink that. We heard a presidential debate last night where former Vice President Biden referred to the reproduction number. And I thought, "Wow, you can just say that, and people might actually understand what you're talking about."

Helen Branswell: Only now, Brian. Only now. That would not have been true 10 months ago.

Brian Goldman: Thanks to people like you, Helen. And then we know, for instance, numbers can be misleading, but the hospital admissions and ICU admissions and deaths are not.

Sarah Everts: I think health reporting went from a niche beat to the purview of general assignment reporter everywhere. And God forbid, as a recovering science journalist, I'd never

have to cover sports. But in terms of how the mainstream media has caught up to this beat, in your minds, what have been some notable missteps and some notable successes writ large as you look back on 10 months of reporting?

Helen Branswell: I can jump in. I think it's a very difficult thing to take on initially. Reproductive numbers and incubation periods and things like that are not things that typically people would know about. A lot of people got on the learning curve and they're doing fairly well. One of my problems with this, and it relates to something that Brian referenced earlier about not messaging to people that things will change, this is a new virus, and we don't know everything about it at the beginning and things will change. I remember this from SARS one and how something would change and you had to tell people, "They didn't make a mistake before. They didn't know before. And now we know." And I thought, "Oh, if this ever happens again, hopefully people will do it better." It hasn't been done better this time around. I don't know how closely everybody's following everything that's happening in the United States, but in the United States, the president is angry at Dr. Anthony Fauci, the head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases because Dr. Fauci is telling the public things the president doesn't want the public to be paying attention to. And so, the president and his aides are constantly pointing to things that Dr. Fauci said early in the outbreak, as proof that, "He got it wrong." Or they point to things that the WHO said early in the outbreak as proof that the WHO was in cahoots with China. In reality, a tweet that the WHO sent out on the 14th of January, you can't hold that against anybody, because there were so little known at that time. We don't do a very good job of explaining to people, things will change. We need to prepare people to understand change and put that change in context, as most reporters are constantly looking for, what did that change? That change must mean they were wrong before, or there's something nefarious here.

Sometimes people did get it wrong before, and maybe then it's appropriate to call them on it, but every time something changes in science, that's not a sign that somebody was hiding information before. We really need to be careful about how we message that. And I think that, some of the non-science reporters haven't caught up to that, frankly.

Sarah Everts: Thanks for that. Does anybody else have any thoughts on notable missteps or notable successes?

Vik Adhopia: I think what really struck me early on was a lot of this kind of breathless reporting about potential new treatments and even the launch of clinical trials, we were seeing a lot of that in the news. I get that a lot of it was driven by US news coverage. Hydroxychloroquine is one that stands out. What also drives it is, the US FDA has quite a different approach to authorizing treatments. Anything that might have a potential use for COVID-19 gets kind of an emergency authorization in the States, and in Canada there's a much more conservative attitude towards it, where they are waiting for some stronger evidence. I think what that causes, as journalists, we can't help but say, "Well, they've got this in the States, why don't we have this in Canada?" There is a lot of that reporting, like it is all hydroxychloroquine.

It also doesn't help that, as I said earlier, there a kind of politicization of research where you have people like the UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, announcing the

results of a dexamethasone clinical trial, where the evidence or the study itself and the numbers and the data aren't even released. And he's the guy that's announcing this. I've seen some reporting where, and again this can't be helped, but not every clinical trial that gets launched needs news coverage. If people knew how few clinical trials actually lead to treatments before this, I think that would be a better sort of context for them. There's a hematologist in the United States I follow on Twitter, Dr. Veneprosod. And he says, "You know, reporting on male studies is a bit like saying men buy lottery tickets." It's probably not going to result in much. I have seen some coverage of that including of vaccines. Clinical trials are complicated things, the faster a trial gets released, the higher the chance of error.

If you want a trial, the results of some research released, make the group smaller. The group of patients will be smaller, but your results will be less reliable. We have seen examples of that all over. On the positive side of things, I think journalists, physicians and researchers have been demanding better data from the government, from all levels of government. I think this pandemic has exposed how poor a job we do of collecting this health data and we're also learning why it's important. Carly alluded to it earlier about how disproportionately certain communities are affected. In the summer we just didn't even have this information. Now, we're learning for example in Toronto, how disproportionately people are affected. People who identify as white, they make up about 45 percent of the population, but they're proportionately the least affected by COVID-19.

The infection rates among Black Canadians in Toronto is the highest and they are actually a small population. That is so critical, not only from a news perspective, but also from a public health policy perspective, if you're going to have more responsive testing. Also, there was another one that really stood out for me. We started reporting on excess deaths at CBC, when we started to wonder whether cancelling all these surgeries was resulting in higher mortality, or whether there were higher rates of mortality that may not have been reported as COVID-19 related. There's demand for this data and the public health agency of Canada coordinated all this from the provinces because it's a provincial jurisdiction. It was there that we learned that Ontario has a paper system of recording causes of death, and it would take months for them to release that information, which would be irrelevant at this point. And it's faxing paper. That's how they do it in Ontario.

That really opened a lot of eyes. And just getting back to race and ethnicity, I think it's the reporting on the social determinants of health, which affects so much about people's outcomes. It's so relevant in this pandemic, those social determinants, and we're learning that people with all these conditions, high blood pressure or whatever makes them more susceptible, or if they live in close quarters, or their quality of housing. It really has changed the narrative of everyone being susceptible. We know that there are just some people who, outside long-term care homes, that they'll be fine, but others, the risk is very high. I think the best reporting has really focused on that, because that's where people get the context, and it makes it more real for them too.

Sarah Everts: Thank you. Carly or Brian, any thoughts on that topic?

- Carly Weeks:** One thing I just wanted to say, I echo a lot of what was said in terms of things like missteps. I could talk for half an hour about the aerosolization, controversy, but I won't. I'll save my mentions on Twitter. But one thing I just wanted to say is that all the missteps we didn't make as a result of the many experts who've made themselves available to us on days or nights or weekends, you name it. I send out a text message to a number of experts and I get an immediate response. That to me is one of the biggest changes. It used to be that you'd have to go through the communications' person, and you'll set up an interview for next week about a study or the person was not available.
- I think I speak for a lot of the health reporters. we're on a first-name basis with every infectious disease expert and epidemiologist, and we're able to contact this network of people and say, "Okay, is this what matters here? What's going on at your hospital?" And they're coming to us with stories, which they would never have come to us before. You fear for your job or things such as that. You don't want to just go off the official narrative, but the stakes are so high here that we're hearing from medical professionals in a way we never did before. And that has been the thing that has helped us elevate our reporting and know what the heck we're talking about frankly.
- Sarah Everts:** Thanks.
- Helen Branswell:** I concur.
- Vik Adhopia:** If I could just add the only one downside to that is, I don't know if Carly might agree with this, is that even before this pandemic, you try to cultivate a relationship with certain doctors and now everybody is calling them and you're like, "Hey, she's ours. Why are you calling them?" And I actually did see one general medicine physician on Twitter, talk about how she was lined up for some interview and it there was poor follow-up. It is so amazing how we have access to these physicians and experts, but it's just since everybody is covering the story now, maybe sometimes they're not handled with the kind of respect that you need for these people who are so valuable in this pandemic.
- Sarah Everts:** Interesting. Thanks. I want to talk a little bit about vaccine hesitancy because of course, a lot of people see the putative COVID-19 vaccine as a panacea for returning us all back to normal and yet vaccine hesitancy even before the pandemic hit was a huge issue worldwide and here in Canada and in the United States. Now we also have a president down south who is politicizing a vaccine, and it's raised fears that regulatory processes won't have full due diligence. Of course, regulatory procedures are different across the border, but the spread of anxiety knows no borders and vaccine hesitancy knows no borders. Moving forward, where do you see vaccine hesitancy having changed or not changed, or what's the impact of COVID-19 on that writ large? Carly you look like you want to say something.
- Carly Weeks:** I'm happy to jump in. This is my sort of pet story. I've been writing on vaccine hesitancy and anti-vaccine people for a long time. It's interesting that at *The Globe and Mail*, we actually don't refer to people as vaccine hesitant anymore. There's so much evolving in that space. We knew before the pandemic struck that there's a sizeable portion of the population that is concerned about vaccines. A Canadian survey shows that 30 percent of people are concerned, they have legitimate

concerns or real concerns about the safety of vaccines, not just theoretical ones. They really do believe that there is something, potentially, that is going to harm them in vaccines. I think that speaks to how powerful some of the campaigns have been to degrade trust.

We have some anti-vaccine groups in Canada, but you know, they're kind of everywhere and with the internet, we have everybody, you have your Del Bigtrees' and the like who will make the rounds and they do these tours. Like many other things, I think that's been amplified and sped up so much because of the pandemic. We're talking about the eventual COVID-19 vaccine and at the same time, a lot of anti-vaccine groups and proponents who have their own agendas, and things to sell and ideas to push, they're undermining trust in a vaccine that hasn't even been invented yet. Then the problem is you have a US president and others who are basically saying, "We're going to push this vaccine through, regardless of whether the safety trials are done." Which then adds to this idea that maybe we all should be afraid of a vaccine because they're not doing the safety studies and they're going to push it through.

We've had experts calling for vaccines to be authorized without the proper clinical safety studies being finished. It's a perfect storm where you take these anti-vaccine groups that are on the rise, and they seem to be attracting more members. And then you have legitimate sources of information suggesting that we're just going to be injecting people, whether or not these things are safe or not. I think that it's done real damage in the long term to this campaign to get people vaccinated quite frankly. I originally thought back in March, that this would be the moment that brings us all together, that we all believe in science again, the public health professionals are going to be the beacons of light that we look to.

In fact, the opposite now seems to be true, even in Canada where we tend to sort of believe our authorities more. It seems like that sentiment is really on the rise. I do fear for what will happen. I think that we're going to see more people turning away from things like vaccines, things that we know work, just even looking at the people who are on my social networks, who trusted people, who have jobs and lives and families. They're not just conspiracy theorists who spend all day on the internet. They are posting things that are conspiracy theories that they found on the internet. Unfortunately, we're all in a little bit of trouble here as a result.

Helen Branswell:

I would like to jump in if you don't mind. I don't disagree with anything that you've said. I'm in complete agreement with you. Although I do think there's a possibility that some of the factors that have made the ground fertile for vaccine hesitancy or rejection may shift with this pandemic, not in the immediate term. One of the things that's been happening is that vaccination campaigns, like kids, aren't getting regular vaccines, adults aren't getting their booster shots for pneumococcal boosters or tetanus shots and so on. We could actually see an increase over time in vaccine preventable diseases. And one of the problems with vaccines is, when they work properly, people don't fear the thing that they're preventing, they fear the vaccine itself. If we actually see an increase in measles outbreak or regular people actually contracting tetanus.

It's theoretically possible that there could be a greater understanding at some level among some people that vaccines are very important. And in terms of COVID-19 vaccines, here in the States it has been hugely frightening, frankly, to watch how the whole thing has been politicized, paradoxically by a president who, before he took office was a vaccine skeptic, who has this summer viewed vaccines as his best shot at re-election. He seems to have come to the understanding that there won't be a vaccine before election day, that is out of reach. He's turned his attention to monoclonal antibodies, the things he thinks cured him of COVID-19. But it is setting up a dangerous situation here. Yesterday, an advisory committee to the FDA met to talk about COVID vaccines in a general way, they didn't have data for specific vaccines.

And it became quite clear that the FDA, which had been, up until now, talking about issuing emergency-use authorizations, is getting nervous about the notion of using emergency-use authorization. It's a very difficult time here. I don't think that's it is going to become less difficult as we get closer to having a vaccine. I would say, at least in the United States, there's so much transmission going on right now, this is going to be a very bad winter and people's views about whether or not they want to get vaccinated may change as the number of people they know have actually become infected. Like Carly mentioned earlier, coming from a town that thinks it's a hoax because nobody has had COVID-19.

As more and more people have COVID-19 that may change. As we all have to hunker down and stay indoors in the winter and pine even more for the before times, as Vik mentioned. Especially if data shows that some of these vaccines are actually fairly effective, there may be some erosion of the anti-vaccine sentiment that exists right now, bringing the numbers back to sort of more of the typical, pro-vaccine-/anti-vaccine kind of situation. I hope.

Sarah Everts: Thanks for that. Vik or Brian, any thoughts?

Vik Adhopia: I've covered vaccine hesitancy even before this. And I've even seen it in my personal life before I was a health reporter, friends or neighbours who had it. I think hesitancy is a really good word because it's people who are on the fence and it's also so insidious in that all you need is a shred of doubt that you can plant in someone's head, which creates this hesitancy, and that's all it really takes. I remember prior to this, there was some secret study that about how vaccines affected Black children that was making the rounds, and people were contacting me about it. And it's just those kinds of doubts that are planted out there. I think also what's contributing to this is, we've never really had this much scrutiny or public or media scrutiny of drug trials and these vaccine trials.

Every time a person gets sick or there's a side effect, we report on that. And that adds to that doubt. But you need the context, that's normal. When you do clinical trials there are always going to be these outliers that are going to have a reaction. I think that is going to contribute or has contributed to the hesitancy and also the amount of money at stake for these companies. These are companies that are putting these drugs through trials, and they really want to succeed. There is so much money at stake. Governments have committed to buying so many doses. That really adds to some of the anxiety around the safety of it. That's really a hard thing to combat when

you're suddenly aware of how sausage are made and your feelings have changed on them. That's kind of what it is. I think it's a product of the times we live in and the amount of coverage where we're giving this sort of stuff.

Sarah Everts: That's interesting Vik. Brian, it looks like you have some thoughts on this too.

Dr. Brian Goldman: One story that pops up every once in a while, but we haven't heard enough about it and I wish we did hear more about it, is the manipulation of public opinion through Bot firms in Russia and elsewhere. There have been studies that have demonstrated, particularly with the measles mumps rubella vaccine, that Bot firms are sending messages on social media, targeting people who are hesitant, reinforcing erroneous beliefs about the safety and efficacy of vaccines. We need to know more about how public opinion is being manipulated in that way. When I was doing columns as the house doctor for CBC Radio. I did at least one column on that in the last year.

We need to take a closer look at that. Public health officials have to do a better job of selling vaccines, because I don't think they do a particularly good job. They tend to be earnest, overly earnest in their messaging, talking down, a bit condescending when it comes to vaccines, treating people like fools, who are simply asking questions about the efficacy and safety of vaccines. And that's a story that I think we need to pay more attention to as well.

Sarah Everts: I totally agree. There's a follow-up question about vaccine hesitancy from one of our participants, just about vaccine hesitancy, should we then not talk or cover the risks of a rushed vaccine? I'm guessing the answer is no. But how do you handle that? Where's the sweet spot?

Dr. Brian Goldman: The one thing I would say in response to that is those of us who were old enough to remember the Swine Flu vaccine, and other vaccines, know there's going to be a time when we go from a small population, who's been exposed to a vaccine, a candidate vaccine that gets approved to a much larger percentage of the population. We're talking about a novel infection to which nobody's immune unless they've gotten the infection, and then we don't know how long they remain immune after that. I would be surprised if we don't see side effects. And I think we need to be prepared for that. With the Swine Flu vaccine, that was the first time we ever heard about Guillain-Barre syndrome.

I'm not saying that's going to happen with the coronavirus vaccine, but it would be irresponsible of us to not be on top of that, the potential for untoward side effects, because I think it's there. Especially with the rushed pace of vaccine development. It has been said that the fastest vaccine in human history was measles, and it was a four-year effort. It took four years, and we're not spending four years on this. People are going to be rolling up their sleeves sometime in the first or second quarter of 2021. We may very well see untoward side effects.

Helen Branswell: I think we have covered some of the positives that have been placed on some of the phase three trials and you can't not cover that. I think you you're doing the public a service trying to figure out how safe things are, but I think you need to put them in context. One of the things that I find reassuring is that these trials are being paused when they see something wrong. This is the system working the way it ought to, and that is something that we need to point out. It's not abnormal for there to be a pause.

People die. A person who's in a trial could die, which could have nothing to do with the trial, but you have to stop and figure out whether there's a causal relationship or if it's just complete bad luck. We have to be careful in the way we explain these things and make sure that we tell people that this is the way the system is meant to be working. But I don't think you can ignore them and especially given, as Brian points out, if it all works the way we hope it will work, multiple new vaccines using platforms made in ways that have never been used for licensed vaccines before are going to be rolling out sometime in the next year or so. And this is going to be a real-world experiment of unprecedented proportions and so, we have to report on this stuff, but you also have to put it in context.

Carly Weeks:

I agree completely with that comment and when it comes to any vaccine, I think that we instill more public confidence the more we're transparent and I think it's incumbent on companies and governments to be as transparent as possible, which so far it appears they are, because we are reporting on these pauses and that is vital. We can always debate, and we should always write about when there is debate about vaccines. I wrote a story a year or two ago about controversy about when to deliver the Gardasil vaccine and if it should be Gardasil or the other vaccine. Should it be two doses or three doses, and maybe it's even one dose. Those are conversations that we need to have.

How effective is the flu shot this year? What we don't want to do is start amplifying voices that just raise controversy, for controversy's sake or conspiracy theories that have nothing to do with reality. We're seeing a little bit of that about mask protests, anti-mask protests, where I've seen the same mistakes that were made with anti-vaccine protests that are being made again with the anti-maskers. Just saying that anti-maskers are taking to the streets to fight restrictions on their freedom, you put that in a headline and you put a photo of their posters saying that masks are somehow trampling all over their individual freedom and then that just gives them free promotion. So, I think it's a fine balance of not repeating the claims.

Sarah Everts:

Thank you. Any other thoughts on this?

Vik Adhopia:

I just had one thought and I don't know if this is related, but I have heard this debate in other circles about public opinion polls on whether people should get vaccinated or feel comfortable getting vaccinated once there's a vaccine. And the debate is, does reporting those numbers actually affect the outcome? Do people who are on the fence, who have doubts, are they looking to be validated for their doubts? That's a question I throw out there. I'm not sure how useful polls are. They're useful maybe for governments because it will tell them how much better a job they need to do, to reassure people that the process is safe. But at the same time, I do wonder what effect that has on individuals who are on the fence or are looking for some sort of validation for their doubts.

Sarah Everts:

That's a hugely important question. Probably one of those polls is one we did here at Carleton, and we found, for example, that vaccine hesitancy hadn't budged even in the face of a global pandemic, 100 years in the making, or perhaps not in the making, but that we hadn't seen in a century. We also found that nearly half of Canadians believed one out of four pieces of misinformation. We really struggled whether even asking that question in a poll. For example, one of the misinformation items people

believed was that it was conceived by a weapon lab in China or the now debunked 5G network. But is asking that question in itself a problem. You do need to take a pulse of the situation but are you causing more harm than good? Anyway, that is a really great platform to jump off to.

Another question about misinformation at large is where's the sweet spot between trying to debunk misinformation that's popping up as a health reporter versus actually just trying to cover the fire hose of information. You want to address the misinformation, but there's so much other important news that needs to be done. What's the sweet spot? How do you decide? Also, how can you proactively fight misinformation? It feels like we are using therapies against misinformation, like fact checking articles. This is wrong, this is wrong. What's the vaccine against misinformation that journalism can do? Those are two thoughts.

Helen Branswell:

I don't know the answer to your last question, in terms of how do we inoculate the public against that? I will say that one of the pieces I wrote in the summer, was about the fact that we were starting to see phase one, phase two data from the clinical trials of the vaccines and something that was becoming fairly clear was that most of these vaccines, in fact, all of the ones we've seen so far are pretty reactogenic. You get a real kick when you get one of these vaccines. Most of us got a flu shot. You don't really feel anything unless the person who administered it hit the wrong part of your muscle or something.

This is going to be more like the Shingles vaccine, I think, which is you were vaccinated, and you might feel crummy. I wrote a piece saying, "Look, this is going to happen." Thinking you can inoculate people against what will certainly come later on social media, by telling people, you should expect this, when people don't expect that kind of thing. That really gives ammunition to the people who want to make hay out of the vaccines. But that doesn't work in every circumstance, and I don't have the full answer. In terms of your question about how much time do you spend trying to debunk stuff versus doing your own reporting? That's something I think I would be surprised if we don't all struggle with all the time.

There's only so much time, there's so much happening and you can be working on something and then something comes up and you ask yourself, "Okay, do I put this aside and go tell people how crazy this is? Or do I continue to do what I'm doing?" I'm not a huge fan of trying to debunk, let me rephrase that. That sounds bad. I don't want to spend so much of my time trying to debunk theories, mistaken ideas or whatever that I give up the opportunity to do original reporting. I really struggled with it.

Vik Adhopia:

Yes. Before the pandemic, we occasionally did one of those debunked stories and they're kind of slam dunk stories that you wonder, will they even make a difference? These sort of vitamin infusions, do they do anything? And, well, here's what the evidence says, "No." Then the story's done. Is it going to make a difference? I don't know. I mean, it's still out there. It's still a popular therapy. I guess the most successful misinformation is based on a kernel of truth. And, for this pandemic, there's so much stuff out there, but I think it's the ones that you see that are recurring, that you have to pay attention to. For example, the phrase "boosting your immune system" that's been around forever and there are careers and businesses based around that concept of boosting your immune system.

I've seen businesses and alternative health practitioners use this pandemic to generate some business and sell the idea of boosting your immune system. I think that is an opportunity to actually do that story. Let's talk about your immune system and how it works and the fact that you can't really boost it in the way you think you can.

I remember I tweeted something about a chiropractor or someone who is a naturopath who was trying to encourage people to get their kids' immune systems boosted with some vitamin C and vitamin D infusions. And I just posted, and someone replied to my tweet and gave me links to articles and it's okay. That's the age we live in, where you just seek out the evidence. It doesn't matter what the journal is or the quality of the study. People just want the evidence. They seek out the evidence, they want to validate their beliefs. I think that's one of the hardest things about trying to debunk misinformation. You're not really going to reach everyone with your stories.

Sarah Everts: Brian, do you have anything you want to add to that

Dr. Brian Goldman: Yes. Our approach to doing stories that we've done before, for instance, a vaccine update might be on the basis of whether there's new information, whether it's been so long since we talked about what's new with vaccines for COVID, that it feels like it's time for an update. I think we could use the same approach with debunking stories as well. We did a debunking story about the fear, the discredited theory that COVID-19 came from a lab in China. And, if there is a kind of an organic reason, if it's bubbling up again because of new information, then, we might want to take another crack at it. But otherwise, I agree with Helen.

I don't want to be doing that every week, but I think it's part of our mandate, part of our responsibility, because so many people are engaged in all aspects of COVID-19, that fire hose as it's been referred to, that I think we need to try to put light on some areas that haven't been explained well. Certainly, we believe that just because we tell an audience something once doesn't mean that we don't have to retell them again in three or four months.

Helen Branswell: Can I just add one more thing? As Brian was speaking, this example popped into my head. Recently there've been a few cases of re-infection that have come to light and including re-infection where the second case was more severe than the first and the internet was starting to go crazy. Apoorva Mandavilli, who writes for *The Times* is like a powerhouse in terms of her output. She wrote this great piece about, yes, there are four cases, but there's only four confirmed cases out of 40 million people who've been infected, and everybody calmed down. That's one way, if you're talking about how do we get on top of this stuff? You can, but it is not so much debunking but that seems something that's about to happen. It's starting to, like a mushroom cloud that's beginning to form, speak and getting in early and saying, yeah, this was to be expected, this will happen. The fact that we only have four cases to reference on the record right now is a fairly decent thing. That's one way of approaching things.

Sarah Everts: Good point. We have a question from Carl Shapiro. He said in terms of we've been talking about selecting what stories to debunk in terms of selecting people we speak to as science journalists, or journalists covering COVID-19. He said in another session

at this conference, one of the public health experts gently recommended a journalist on the same panel for excess reliance on quote, “Infectious disease specialists.” I guess she had said why is this a public-health issue? Why not? Why are you not talking to public health experts? With this array of possible expertise to source virologists, public health experts, bioinformaticians, the list goes on, what do the panellists think about this point of view of how do we know who to reach out to?

Dr. Brian Goldman: I have to jump in first because our episode of *White Coat, Black Art* this weekend features not one, but two public health specialists. We have Deena Hinshaw, who’s the Chief Medical Officer of Health for Alberta. And we have Eileen de Villa, who is Toronto’s Public Health Officer. I think one of the reasons why we don’t necessarily talk to them is that they often don’t deviate from their prepared scripts. You’ll have to decide for yourself, listen to the show. Did I manage to get them off their script? I’m not sure that I did. I have found personally that I’m more likely to get answers to questions when I speak to epidemiologists and when I speak to infectious disease specialists, which is why we rely on them. Those are our opinions at *White Coat, Black Art* and the *Dose*.

Carly Weeks: We face this a lot. Again, it’s actually kind of nice to take a step back for a while, but it’s a constant debate. Who do you contact for this story? While in the pandemic we were probably, and I certainly was, contacting a lot of the same people, if not two people, but a handful of five to 10 experts, who you might be speaking to on a regular basis. I think that’s important to continue doing, because you have a relationship with these people, and they can tell you things that are going on. I’m talking about people that are helping to inform the province, maybe behind the scenes, but these are people who are in charge at the major hospitals, in places like Toronto, but at the same time, you do risk missing a lot of the important stuff that’s going on outside of the big cities.

First of all, that’s often a problem that we have in large media outlets. You constantly are talking to people in the big cities. So, what is going on in smaller centres? And what are the expertise of other people that are also seeing effects?

One story I wrote that I was quite proud of, was about the impact that kidney patients were facing. I got a tip from a kidney specialist in Ottawa about what was going on there and the double whammy, because if you need to have dialysis, you’re going into the hospitals all the time and your immune system is compromised. There were a lot of outbreaks in those units as a result. It is an important pressing issue that we face. And one that we can’t let our guard down, you have to constantly be reassessing. Who are you speaking to? Are there other voices? Are there people that are really good experts who you might have to nudge a little bit to get to talk to you, to even make sure you’re getting a representative sample of people? I’ll leave it there. But that is a great question.

Sarah Everts: Vik, looks like you want to join in.

Vik Adhopia: I guess also for when you’re in broadcast, you do tend to gravitate towards people who can really give you great clips who can summarize their thoughts in a really pithy way. And you can’t really give them 10 seconds and make them really nail it in 10 seconds. It’s hard not to go back to those people. Again, you’re balancing the

demands of broadcasting, which are counter to quality, the kind of reporting that you'd like to do, but you have to fit it all into this mould to make it work for TV. There is a kind of bias towards people who are great talkers and great speakers and are really engaging in their interviews.

Helen Branswell: Part of the problem sometimes is that people who are great talkers and great speakers answer the phone when we call. Sometimes I don't know the circumstance of this public health person, but sometimes they have to get permission from elsewhere. If it takes a really long time, that's going to be a problem. Some people are not as comfortable doing interviews, even though they probably know far more information that would be great to get out if they would do it. Conversely, some people are too comfortable giving interviews. We have to be careful in our business. I can't think of a polite name to call them right now. So, I'm not going to use one, but there are certainly people who seek interview time a lot and are happy to speak about anything.

I have made it sort of a foundational rule of my reporting. Somebody who's willing to talk about any aspect of the story doesn't know enough about any of them to be a very good person to speak to. I respect a person who says to me I'm really not up on that, or I am not the best person to speak to you about that. What you really need is to speak to somebody who is a bio statistician or an ecological biologist or whatever and points you in the direction of other people or even just in the direction of another class of experts. I think nobody can know everything, and the people who are good with a clip, I don't mean to snipe at TV reporting, because we all do it, but we all have to be careful about it.

Dr. Brian Goldman: To the good list that Helen just gave us criteria of that we might use as a filter, I'm going to add one more. And that is if I'm monitoring what experts are saying on social media, and if I get the sense that they're beginning to mount a campaign and going after particular government officials and say that certain people should be fired, it makes me think twice about going to them for an unbiased point of view, because I think they're branching off, away from expertise into advocacy. When that happens, I think we lose credibility when we want them to be on our show just because they're good talkers. Of course, we need good talkers in radio just as they do in television as well. But that is another criteria that we use. I want to see what they have to say on social media as well. That's another criteria I used.

Sarah Everts: Interesting. We have a question that's kind of an existential question that I think we've all dealt with before, which is how do you find the balance between reporting the specifics and simplifying the information for the public, but specifically for COVID-19? We are in a moment where, people on the street are talking about cytokine storms. Do you have any thoughts on where do you find that sweet spot when the public has a strangely well-developed sense of virology and yet it doesn't, given all the misinformation we have?

Helen Branswell: Somebody told me recently that in March, everybody was an amateur epidemiologist and now everybody's an amateur virologist. I kind of like that, but it's a teachable moment if people can start to think about things in terms of reproductive numbers and transmission dynamics and incubation periods and so on, why should we deprive them of it? We should take advantage of that. I think it's great.

Carly Weeks: I think one thing for us in our reporting and discussions we had at *The Globe and Mail*, certainly as the months wore on, and some of the appetite did wane, is we had to just reassess what our coverage looked like. Are you reporting on the minutia every day or are you sort of trying to figure out what are the big stories and how do we push this story forward? How do we tell this in a different way? And as our officials started to actually release some data, it gave us something more to work with. So now the story is that more young people are being affected. What does that look like in those stories? You might have that opportunity to then get into some of the details and some of the infection rates and things such as that.

What does this all mean? And in our testing rates and positivity rates I agree 100 percent with Helen. Let's use this and there's no need to dumb down the reporting, but I think at the same time, the other question we have to keep in focus is how we serve our audiences. What stories are we trying to tell them? Every little itty bitty thing that comes out or every sort of step forward or some new journal article that comes out that might not merit coverage? Maybe we might need to take a bigger look at where is this pandemic heading in our neck of the woods and how do we get on top of that? We're seeing, once again, long-term care homes are becoming a problem. So how do we tell that story in a new way? I think that'll continue to be the challenge in the months ahead.

Dr. Brian Goldman: Two points, I have found that the health literacy of our audiences is much higher than it might be in a lot of other health stories, because there's so much that we don't have to explain because there's an incremental increase in literacy to do with COVID-19.

That's one point I wanted to make. So, aim high. The other thing that I want to say is that the data that we present is contextual. If it's important to the story, then I think we have to explain it. For instance, if there's a story as there was in *The Toronto Star* in the last couple of weeks about how Melbourne, with a similar population to the greater Toronto area, had a lockdown, which was triggered by a certain level of infection, of community spread of the infection but Toronto didn't have a lockdown, a second lockdown, then you have to explain what is it about the numbers? Then you have to start to talk about reproduction number and other statistics. I think that you provide that data when it's necessary and when it isn't, when it gets in the way of the story, then perhaps you don't provide it.

Sarah Everts: I have another existential question. Both Helen and Brian touched upon it in their opening remarks. There's been a lot of criticism about public health recommendations changing. And this criticism, often from the public, sometimes from journalists, is often framed as science keeps changing and scientists keep changing their minds.

Helen Branswell: Thank God.

Sarah Everts: Exactly. If you know anything about science or public health then you celebrate this change, because it indicates incremental evolution of our understanding, and you don't want public health officials to be digging their heels in. But I think this criticism has revealed a fundamental public misunderstanding about how science operates. I'm wondering is this because health and science journalists have spent too much

time doing reporting on single studies in the past? Or I guess more writ large, what role have journalists played in this public misunderstanding? What role do we play in changing it?

Vik Adhopia:

I don't have the answer to that, but I think a small point worth mentioning is whenever, for example, you're reporting on a study that points to X, there's sort of a consensus about certain things in science. And I think we could spend a bit more time reporting on that. There are resources available for that, like the *Cochrane Review*, for example, they're quite responsive where, for example, they're looking at convalescent plasma and they will look at the scientific landscape at that moment and say, these are all the studies, only these certain studies are of this higher quality, and this is what we can safely conclude, or not conclude, from this research.

Then I think using that sort of background context helps the audience with when you're reporting on new science that seems to be changing. There's not a lot of new findings that happen in a vacuum. They're iterative and they build on other findings, and I think giving that background to people helps the understanding

Helen Branswell:

Early in my career as a health reporter I covered a lot of single studies. It was kind of the bread and butter. The longer I've been at it, the less I do that. I have to confess I'm in a job right now where my bosses don't want me to do single studies. They want me to do bigger pieces and that's a huge luxury. Not every journalist has that luxury, so I don't know that I have an answer for everybody, but a single study is a single study, and it may add something, it may challenge, but it's not going to answer the question.

Carly Weeks:

I completely agree. I remember it was always what's the study today. We used to write a lot on studies and now we're in the fortunate position. I work at a big national newspaper with multiple health reporters and so we can write some of the bigger stories. And I do. I think about some of the places I used to work and where I came from and they have a skeleton staff now. Part of the broader issue facing journalism is there's simply not enough of us to do the job. It's very difficult even at a large paper, like *The Globe and Mail*, when we get on something, you can easily start to educate and inform the public. We'll see how much the public doesn't understand about the nuances of COVID-19.

We can help shape thinking and inform. But it's very difficult because even we have to pick and choose, because there's not enough of us to report on it. If you are reading your local paper and a lot of people do only rely on their local paper or their local source of news, you're not necessarily hearing any of this. You hear snippets of a conversation and that's when everyone scrolls social media. You get up in the morning, you're scrolling through your phone and you see someone posting something that they saw and it's clickable and shareable. And then that becomes something that you think, even if it's a conspiracy theory that is completely wrong.

I will say that public health officials do a great job at what they do, of helping keep us safe and making sure, hopefully, enough vaccines in stock and that kind of thing, but we don't spend nearly enough time on that on the public health messaging. A lot of public health offices aren't on Instagram or TikTok where a lot of eyeballs are. Their messaging is still sort of in the twentieth century. Unfortunately, they're up against

people that are really, really good experts at social media and getting posts that are likable and sharable. Again, on that point of degrading the information sources that are out there and contributing to this flow of misinformation.

Sarah Everts: Thanks. Brian, it looks like you also have a thought on this.

Dr. Brian Goldman: Sarah you framed the question as an existential question and when you put it that way, I feel compelled to remind everyone about the politicization of health information. For instance, we've witnessed something absolutely unprecedented, at least in North American reporting, to have a president of the United States attacking Dr. Anthony Fauci for changing his mind on masks and saying that somehow his information is unreliable, he's unreliable as an expert. And that is exactly what President Trump has suggested. If Trump is an aberration and there's a different president and we go back to the way things were, then fine, but I don't think that's going to happen. I think what he's done is point the way to say, see, you can take on experts and say that they're politically motivated, that he's a Democrat, and once people get the idea that it's okay to do that, then who knows maybe the flood gates will open.

And if that happens, then it's going to be even more incumbent on health reporters to calmly, quietly explain their methodology and that they're trying to be the most honest brokers in a world where there's incomplete knowledge that is being added to incrementally all the time. But it's a real challenge right now.

Sarah Everts: I have a question from the audience. How important is it for health reporters to have some sort of medical education? How can you get up to speed quickly if you don't have it and you're forced on the COVID beat? Or the health beat writ large?

Helen Branswell: Brian, go ahead. The only doctor on the panel.

Sarah Everts: Right, I think that that's worth pointing out that some of the most esteemed journalists on this beat don't have a medical background, but Brian does. Brian, you want to start?

Dr. Brian Goldman: The first thing I want to say is that there've been lots of studies that have looked at the accuracy and the reliability of reporting and basically, you need to be a health reporter who's on the beat. There's certainly value in specialty reporting as opposed to being a general assignment reporter. You don't have to have a medical degree or a nursing degree or a degree from another health profession. You just have to be dedicated to what you do. You have to use your skills. You have to be prepared to learn. You have to find experts that you can rely on. You have to read up on stuff. At Ryerson and at Carleton, there are medicine and science reporting fellowships and Master's degrees. I just want to disavow anybody who thinks that you need to have a medical degree to do this. In fact, it could be quite the opposite — that medical degree can be used for evil as well as for reliability in reporting.

Sarah Everts: How can it be used for evil?

Dr. Brian Goldman: Dr. Mercola, take a bow. Dr. Oz, take a bow. Unfortunately, there are far too many examples of so-called physicians who use their platforms to misinform the public. And of course, that's fodder for health reporters to try to debunk. That's been done by Vox and other esteemed media outlets as well.

Carly Weeks:

I kind of cringe when I think of all the mistakes that I've made probably over the years, just because I don't have a medical background and some of the stories, I can only remember like a fraction of what I've actually written, but sometimes you do sort of just shudder and think, why would I have ever written on that? We have the luxury of time. When the stakes weren't quite so high, you write a story and you got all the facts right and you spelled everyone's name correctly, but maybe it was a mouse study that never should have seen the light of day. Stories like that. I think that I have a much broader knowledge than I did many years ago. Still not where I need to be. I still need to keep learning. That is one of the joys of being a journalist, you always are learning.

But there are courses that you can take. And I think the number of those that I've seen certainly have actually grown, which is great. There is more of a move in some public health institutions to create some of those courses which is great. We need more of that. At the same time, if you're a journalist and you're thrown into this and you're the COVID reporter this week, I think one of the best things you can do is start following people like Helen and people who know what they're talking about and follow closely what they're interested in, what they're writing on, what they are saying. What are some of the top experts saying? And you can quickly sort of get at least a base of knowledge.

You're not necessarily going to be able to write a scientific paper on it, but you'll start to have a really good base of knowledge. You can avoid some of the big pitfalls, and it will really help guide you. But again, it would be great if all of us, myself included, had more of a knowledge base, but certainly there are ways that you can catch up without having to go back to school for years and years.

Vik Adhopia:

I think doing this job, it is a learn-as-you-go job. There's almost an advantage to coming in without a medical background in that the people that you interview, you have to get them to explain things to you that you wouldn't necessarily understand because you don't come from a science background. And that actually helps you tell the story. There are also a couple of great resources available. There's a US association called the Association of Health Care Journalists. And if you join that, you get this great little booklet. It's a PDF called *Covering Medical Research* and it's a guide to reporting on studies. It actually informs a lot of how you should approach reporting on health. It's written by Gary Schwitzer, who does HealthNewsReview.org. It's a good sort of base to begin from.

Sarah Everts:

Helen did you have a quick thought?

Helen Branswell:

In newsrooms there's just this long, long tradition of moving around, going from beat to beat. You start out as a generalist and you cover city hall, or you might cover the provincial legislature. You don't know that much about what you're reporting on initially and then you acquire a lot of knowledge. I did that for the first half of my career and then I became the health reporter. The health beat learning curve was the steepest one I ever had to climb. Yes, there's still lots of stuff I don't know. It's daunting, but at least I know now where to go when I don't know the answer to things, which is helpful.

But for the first three or four years that I did it, which is a long time in a beat, I went home almost every night thinking, "Oh my God, what am I going to find out that I

wrote that was wrong with my story?" It takes learning. Would it have been nice to have had some science background? Yes, it would have been, but I didn't. I have a B.A. in English literature.

Sarah Everts: Thank you. It certainly could help, but it's absolutely not necessary. In the last minute, I just want to do a quick round robin again, just to ask each of you to tell us your parting thoughts. What is the thing we should keep in mind as we face the second wave or the extension of the first wave, wherever you may be, writ large? What should the media be covering? What are you thinking about? Just a quick thought from each of you. Let's start with you, Vik.

Vik Adhopia: There's a lot. I think what we've learned from the first wave of this is that what had happened in Europe really was a sort of glimpse into the future of what happened here in Canada. We need to really pay attention to the way foreign governments that have similar health-care systems to Canada, how they respond to the second wave and what works and what doesn't. So that's sort of the macro view. The micro view is I think we need to really follow some of the communities and the places that are going to be hardest hit and not allow the numbers, just the raw numbers, to influence how we tell the story, but dig a little deeper. Whether it's the certain communities that are most affected or the level of hospitalization that's taking place with this increase in numbers. I think it's sort of paying attention to the bigger picture and also not to ignore the things that are happening next door.

Sarah Everts: Good points. Brian, what's your parting thought?

Dr. Brian Goldman: My parting thought, Sarah, is that I'll be paying attention to the times when I'm getting too close to groupthink. That everybody in health reporting is starting to sing from the same song sheet and saying the same thing and just checking myself for assumptions that we're making. Or that we're talking to the same experts who are making prognostications about COVID-19, and then checking them to see are they actually turning out the way they were predicting? For instance, the second wave, primarily involving younger people. Now we see there are concerns that as more people, younger people become infected that inevitably will result in older people getting infected and therefore more hospitalizations and more deaths. I'm going to keep reminding myself of that and ask, is that happening? Is that actually happening? Was that a genuine prediction that we needed to be concerned about or did it turn out to be false?

I'm also going to be looking to see if lessons are being learned on the fly. For instance, how we manage people in long-term care who have COVID-19. We have some early indications that they're not learning the lesson so that the infrastructure hasn't been changed quickly enough. Those are the kinds of things I'm going to be watching over the next few months.

Sarah Everts: Thank you. Carly?

Carly Weeks: It's become increasingly clear that we're not all in this together. There are certain people that are bearing the brunt of this and others who are saying it's business as usual. We know a lot more than we did back in March and April. As journalists, we are in a position to push back on official lines and to say, why aren't you doing these things that we know work? We have experience with a wave of this already. I think

also telling stories in a different way. We were very constrained early on. No access to hospitals. A doctor pointed out to me that people might take this more seriously if they saw people that were really sick with this. And we didn't see a lot of that here in Canada.

My colleague Kelly Grant published a piece last week. She spent five days in a hospital. That kind of reporting is incredibly valuable. It makes it real for people. We need more of that and more of the storytelling of the people that are bearing the brunt. Make them real to people. If it's racialized communities in cities like Toronto that are facing such high rates of this virus, let's tell their stories because it can create empathy for these groups that are at risk and create the circumstances that can keep them safe.

Sarah Everts: Thank you. Helen?

Helen Branswell: Two things. Vaccines are going to be incredibly important in the next few months and well into next year, as we try to figure out how to live with this virus. Vaccines are incredibly difficult to design and test and deploy. There are going to be all sorts of issues. I'm surprised frankly, that none of the candidates have fallen out yet. It's unusual and statistically it's a bit of an anomaly. I think we need to be prepared and the public needs to be prepared for the fact that something might not work. Or that there might be problems that come from use of some of these vaccines.

The other thing I would say is I thought for a really long time that the public hasn't been well prepared for how long we're going to be living with this thing. This is not like a three-month thing or a one-year thing. This is a new virus that has completely seeded itself in the world. It's not going away. It's not like SARS-1. We did not manage to extinguish it. It's here. We need to learn how to deal with it. Our immune systems need to learn how to deal with it. There are going to be changes for years. I don't think people get that. I think this stuff about taking off the masks and pretending that this isn't real is because it hasn't been explained to people very well that this is the new reality. We're not going to have to wear masks forever, but there isn't a quick way out of this. And people need to understand that.

Sarah Everts: Thank you to each and every one of you for being on this panel today, for your thoughts and for doing the work that you've done over nearly a year. Stay strong and again, thank you very much.



JOURNALISM IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

COVID-19 AND MEDIA FREEDOM

PANEL

Moderator: Khadija Patel, International Press Institute
Speakers: Courtney Radsch, Committee to Protect Journalists;
Meera Selva, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism; Peter Erdelyi, 444.hu

Khadija Patel:

Good evening from Johannesburg, South Africa. my name is Khadija Patel and I am really looking forward to this discussion, just at sunset over here, we're enjoying a balmy spring day. Hope wherever you are, you are enjoying similarly good weather. We have a great panel assembled here, but we are also talking about something that's crucially important. The International Press Institute, of whom I am the vice chairperson, documented at least 17 countries in recent months who've enacted some sort of legislation against "Fake news or online misinformation." South Africa is one of the states that passed regulations as part of the lockdown.

We had one of the strictest lockdowns in the world earlier this year. And as part of the set of regulations that were passed was basically, pretty much criminalizing disinformation. That was alarming for me at the time. I was the editor-in-chief of the *Mail & Guardian*. I saw this and I immediately picked up the phone to our lawyer and said, "We've got to challenge this in court. There's no way we can allow this to go on, because who ultimately is the arbiter of what is fake or not?" And my worry was that as soon as government does not like what we're publishing, they would use this regulation to thwart us.

So, my lawyer looked into it. He came back and told me, "Look, the way the regulation is drafted, he believes it is nearly impossible for government or the authorities to prosecute bona fide journalists, or news publishers for "fake news." There was actually an arrest under this regulation. It was a man in Cape Town who was using WhatsApp and other social media to broadcast very unscientific, to put it gently, versions of what was happening at the time. He was arrested. We didn't see this regulation being used en masse to thwart journalists. South Africa still has a very vibrant civil society. Although we did record some instances in which journalists were attacked, for example, journalists went missing, especially community journalists had it quite tough.

Overall, we had it better than for example, our colleagues in neighbouring Zimbabwe or Tanzania. The thing about COVID just like it exposes existing frailties in our personal health, I think what it's done is expose the frailties in our global systems, in our society. We know that in recent years levels of press freedom around the world have actually been in decline. Then along comes this pandemic, ravaging populations. And what it's done, I think, is exposed an undemocratic trend in much of the world, and a trend that sees the media as the enemy, and sees governments not shy or afraid, to use their power to throttle what's coming out of the press.

I've got a fantastic panel assembled here to take this discussion further. Courtney Radsch, is from the Committee to Protect Journalists. Meera Selva is joining us from the United Kingdom, she is with the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford, and Peter Erdelyi, I apologize if I've butchered any of your names, is a journalist from Hungary or from the fantastic publication, 444, which is quite inspirational, I think for most of us journalists. To kick us off I'm going to invite Courtney to take us through what you think.

Courtney Radsch:

Great. Well, thank you so much for the introduction. The Committee to Protect Journalists has been monitoring since the outset of the virus, what its impact on journalists, both in terms of, from a press freedom perspective, as well as a safety perspective and what that impact was going to be. Because it was quite clear early

on that it would potentially change the way that journalists had to do their work. And what we feared, unfortunately, was proven right, that it would also provide an impetus for a crackdown on press freedom. Unfortunately, we see with many crises that they are also times of opportunities for authoritarian crackdown. In this case, we have seen that it really has rippled across different types of political systems. As we've heard the pandemic referred to as an infodemic, we see that the journalists are paying the price in terms of a range of factors.

And so I'm going to share a map that we have produced, that outlines a few of these trends. We are tracking essentially 10 symptoms of the press freedom situation around the world and the backlash against the press. You'll see that we are tracking these 10 categories in different places around the world, but chief among these are the opportunity that the coronavirus has provided for governments as an excuse to wield fake news laws, misinformation laws, sometimes under the guise of new health laws, sometimes existing laws, as a way to restrict independent reporting, to restrict critical reporting, especially on coronavirus response or on levels of infection, etc., and as a reason to implement new laws. We'd already seen that the number of journalists imprisoned on false news charges has risen over the past few years, we anticipate this will continue.

We have certainly seen that now there seems to be greater acquiescence in many cases to authorities adopting the rhetoric around needing to prevent the spread of false news, but too often that is being used against journalists. We've also seen cases where journalists have even been expelled from a country, foreign journalists, for example in Egypt, and a reporter who reported critically and in contradiction of the official situation there was expelled. We have seen emergency laws proliferate, chief among these from Hungary, where Prime Minister Victor Orban essentially has the right to rule by decree now, and in Thailand where the government can correct reports that it considers to be incorrect and allows for charges under the Computer Crimes Act.

Around the world we're seeing the proliferation of laws, the arrests of journalists for contravening existing or new laws and states of emergency that are being used to restrict these rights. We're also seeing the issue of censorship, both in terms of individual websites, but also when we see entire internet shutdowns around the world. This obviously not only restricts the ability of journalists to report and disseminate their information, but also has broad repercussions for other people in that society. As well, we have seen arrests, threats and harassment.

We've seen journalists have also been threatened and harassed not only by authorities, but also by the public. Obviously, we know arresting journalists is a tried-and-true tactic of authoritarian regimes around the world, but we've also seen that there has been some anti-foreigner sentiment in various countries or anti-minority sentiment. For example, in the United States, Asian-American journalists or Asian journalists reporting that they were getting threats and harassment in India, and we are hearing that Muslim journalists were facing the same.

The public doesn't understand how journalists are out there reporting, but also doing so in a way that will keep themselves safe. They have even been attacked in public because of a perceived risk that maybe those journalists are bringing

COVID back to their homes or to their populations. There are authorities who do not seem to be familiar with whether or not journalists are restricted by quarantine requirements or by stay-at-home orders. There was a case, for example, in South Africa, which Khadija mentioned earlier, the situation there and elsewhere in the world where authorities have arrested or detained, or assaulted journalists who are out trying to report during COVID. Then we've got the issue of all of these journalists with the exception of those who are out on the frontlines reporting or who are photojournalists, and the nature of their job requires them to be out.

Many journalists are working from home, working from their computers and relying on digital technologies to do their reporting. As a result, they are particularly susceptible to hacking, surveillance and, of course, online harassment and other threats that come with working in a primarily digital environment. The issue of online harassment has really become endemic to the practice of journalism, even before coronavirus, and it's still happening. But as we're seeing that more and more journalists and people in general are living more of their lives online than they did, online harassment is a real issue that journalists need to contend with, and think about how we can have more proactive responses to not only depend on journalists and what they can do to keep themselves secure and safe, but also what the tech platforms and what policy makers can do to do the same.

Because one of the issues that is part of this infodemic is the disinformation and propaganda campaigns that are being perpetrated by many actors, including political parties and governments, it's very difficult for journalists to counteract these coordinated online harassment campaigns or disinformation campaigns. It makes journalism very difficult to rise to the top of the social media feed, to get through the algorithmic kind of decision making that favours exaggeration and extremism. There are a range of these types of threats. I just want to wrap up by pointing out that we've also seen the expansion of surveillance regimes around the world that are extensively designed to help combat the spread of coronavirus or to help people understand that they might be affected.

And while there are absolutely very real health-related objectives to that, and there may be some ways that technology can be used to help combat the spread of the virus, the problem is that in many cases these regimes are being rolled out and implemented without sufficient safeguards on how that data can be collected, who has access to it, how long will it be maintained, and how can it be deployed? We don't yet have any instances that I'm aware of journalists being targeted, but if we look at what happened in the wake of 9/11 and the so-called war on terror and how that gave rise to a surveillance apparatus that was then deployed against journalists, I think that we all need to be aware in a world when that's what we're seeing with respect to the different types of threats and challenges that journalists are facing.

Khadija Patel: Thanks so much, Courtney, it's a lot to chew on and we'll maybe unpack a little bit of what you said during the Q and A. I'm going to turn now to Meera.

Meera Selva: Hi, thanks very much, Courtney. I thought it's an excellent overview of what's happening, very, very comprehensive. I agree with everything you say, so I will repeat it. I think the two things I want to highlight is that we're in this kind of very strange environment of what is a journalist and who decides what a journalist is?

And this has been an ongoing debate, played out across societies, but right now you have governments literally having to say, “We give these sectors key worker status, we allow access to these individuals onto these parts of the street and in many places we provide the licensing that allows journalists to go.” This can be direct, this can be literally a kind of license to get into a press conference, but it can be a wider thing of, are you giving the right to travel to the next town?

And this is something that we have seen, for example, in the Philippines. I have friends working as journalists in the Philippines who say, “It’s a really strange idea that the president’s office gets to get right down to local journalism level and decide which local reporters for a news publication are allowed to travel around.” This is hugely problematic for all the reasons you can imagine that you’re giving authorities the ability to kind of control this workflow. But also crucially, it’s very unpleasant for the journalist involved, because these licenses aren’t linked to a newsroom or a story, they’re linked to an individual. That individual is the one who has to go out and if they get sick or are unable to go, or don’t feel comfortable going, then there’s a silence, that that ability to travel can’t be moved elsewhere.

I think this is really dangerous and we’re already beginning to see the kind of implications and the fallout from this in many countries, because my real fear is that this will somehow become the norm. A lot of governments for a long time have said, “We would like assessment of licensed journalists, please.” It’s been too difficult and too unwieldy, and there’s not been public support for it, but I worry that something that we create in a crisis might become the norm.

The other thing in tandem to that is, as Courtney said, “Newsroom journalists are working from home,” not just foreign correspondents, but domestic staffers. They are under tremendous amounts of pressure. They’re often under online attacks and political attacks, and they are not being able to access support networks at all. They’re not being able to access support from their colleagues, they’re not being allowed to vent in the informal network settings, but they’re also sometimes not really being given places to say, “This is happening to me.” You’re sitting in your room trying to report, facing all these pressures and there is no outlet. This is something that we’re only beginning to see the impact of, because I can’t see how this won’t really traumatize people going forward.

At the Reuters Institute, we’ve done a lot of research on journalism and news usage. We didn’t really focus on press freedom as such, we looked at how people are consuming the news during the pandemic. But there were some interesting trends that will impact on press freedom, which is that at the beginning of the crisis, there was an absolute spike in news usage. There was a rallying behind the media, the value of independent journalism was very clearly understood, both independent journalism and crucially good quality public-sector broadcasting. They all saw spikes in usage with lots of people needing the information, that’s fallen away, partly because it’s become a very ongoing story. It has meant that other stories haven’t had any ad time. So, people just get uninterested in the news because if you don’t want to read the news on COVID, there’s nothing else to entertain you.

As governments mismanage the responses to the pandemic, trust in media often falls along with trust in government. You then end up with a situation where the

public is then losing that original connection to journalism and journalists. We have quite alarming research that shows that in the United Kingdom, many people, about one-third, think that the coronavirus situation in the United Kingdom has been made worse by how the news media has covered it. It's not just that they're ambivalent or neutral, but they think that the news media is making a difficult situation worse. If you tally that with the tendency of authoritarian leaders to attack the press and say that the press tends to make societal problems worse, you can see that this is going into a very, very dangerous space for journalism.

Khadija Patel: Thanks very much Meera, a lot to unpack. We're going to go first to Peter.

Peter Erdelyi: Thank you. Before I jump into detailing the effects the pandemic has had on free speech in Hungary, let me give you a very brief, relevant background of our general situation. The current government, led by Prime Minister Victor Orban, has been in power for over 10 years. Most of this time, they had a super majority in Parliament and have changed the constitution eight times and reshaped, or attempted to reshape, every part of Hungarian society, mostly to increase their influence. This is especially true for media where the government has been super effective. Over the past 10 years, government-aligned oligarchs strategically bought up newspapers, portals, TV and radio stations, and turned them into organs of government propaganda.

Now there's an unprecedented concentration of outlets under government control, and after almost a decade of complaining about an unfair media sphere, Prime Minister Orban said last September that he feels the right and the left controls 50-50 percent of the media, which he thought was a good way to look at it. The pace of new acquisitions by government-controlled entities is still down, partially because there are very few independent outlets left to acquire. There was a kind of uneasy calm for about a year in 2019. Last October, the government lost some key cities during local elections. One of the contributing factors was a videotape that surfaced three weeks before the vote, which showed a prominent pro-government politician and a lawyer involved in some shady real estate deals taking part in an orgy on a yacht in the Adriatic, drug use was also implied. I think this was a very important reminder for the government that their control of the media is far from absolute and a scandal like this could hurt them politically. It spread like wildfire, despite the pro government outlets trying to ignore it. When the pandemic and the lockdown began, audience number, and this is something Meera mentioned, for the remaining independent outlets, skyrocketed when people needed reliable information to make decisions about health, lives and security. They knew where to turn. I think this was another important lesson for the government. They built a huge media empire, but it was not really effective in a time of crisis. The COVID situation right now is really bad in Hungary. We had it relatively easy during the first phase and because of that and the rally-around-the-flag effect, the government was really popular.

The pandemic was and still is the first thing on people's minds. It's not free media that concerned most people. We had Index, they were the largest independent online outlets in Hungary. They had problematic ownership for a decade, but they learned to produce great independent journalism, even under government-friendly owners. You had this realization that you need more control because of the scandals last year, and after seeing media consumption patterns as the virus spreads. People worry about other things than free speech and you have a boost in popularity. The

next general elections are scheduled for 2022, two years away. If you want to do something major, this is the opportunity and you have the largest independent portal, a thorn in your side for a long time, where you can influence the owners. I think this was a perfect storm and so the editor of Index was sacked in July, most of the staff walked in protest and governmental line actors took over soon after.

There was no master plan, there rarely ever is. It's a constant cost-benefit analysis in my opinion. What can be gained by taking over yet another outlet? What's the potential political cost? It was a combination of these factors and the opportunities created by the pandemic that led to this, but the results are devastating nevertheless. Independent Index is gone, they also operated the largest open blogging platform used by the most prominent civil society organizations from the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union to various LGBTQ groups, and now they don't have a conduit to reach mainstream audiences. We are trying to build something quickly, but it's not a trivial exercise.

In addition to all of this, the government wants to extend its influence beyond traditional media, and this is where our fake news law comes in, which I'm not sure is aimed at journalists or aimed mainly at journalists. As the virus began to spread, the government pretty much centralized all related communication; only the surgeon general and a few police officers were officially allowed to talk to the press on COVID-related issues. If you call the hospital and ask about the number of patients they have or a research institution about the testing, you are told that they can't answer your question and you have to turn to the central government communication office. While there is a daily broadcast by the surgeon general under the select group of police officers and, in theory, you can send them questions via email, they just ignore any questions they don't want to answer. Therefore, there's no way to ask anything. During these daily broadcasts from the very beginning, the police began talking about the threat of fake news, and fearmongering almost every day. They talk about how people can only trust them, official communications by the government and no one else.

In the spring, the Parliament adopted a big law that threatened anyone with a five-year prison sentence who spreads information that hinders the defensive efforts of the government, and viewers of the government's daily broadcasts are constantly reminded of this — be super careful about what you share on Facebook, it can really be dangerous, it can get you into trouble. I don't think this is aimed at professional journalists, we have good lawyers and in-depth understanding of the relevant laws and the environment in general, but I think most people are not experts on what constitutes free speech and why would they be? I think this is potentially intimidating and it can discourage ordinary people from speaking up. In the middle of May, police raided the homes of two individuals under this legislation and both of them had posted stuff on Facebook critical of the government and its handling of the crisis. An opposition mayor of a small town in the south of Hungary was also investigated after posting about a possible infection in his town.

The charges were dropped in all of these cases, but I think the damage may already be done. A healthy public discourse goes beyond professional politicians and journalists. We need the voices of teachers, doctors, business owners, your local bus driver and when people see their neighbour being taken away by the police for

something they shared on Facebook, it could be intimidating regardless of whether they end up in prison or not. The police raiding their home at dawn is, I think, warning enough. This is also an attempt at controlling stories spreading in social media, something that could potentially hurt the government as they learned during the yacht orgy scandal most recently.

The Hungarian Civil Liberties Union operates a legal aid hotline and report a sharp increase in the number of people asking them about what they are allowed and not allowed to say on social media under this new legislation, people are asking them if they are allowed to post about their own experiences in hospitals, for example. Like my first example with Index, to my mind, this is also a gradual process, it's not like the prime minister suddenly got up one day and said, "Let's arrest people over their Facebook posts." The government wants to control as much information as they can. They are trying to discourage people from sharing anything other than the official line. This is partially done by exaggerating the threat of fake news. The police are under pressure to bring in cases and because of the past decade of dismantling checks and balances at institutional independence, they can't resist. Since we don't have a huge COVID-related fake news problem, but the police still want to satisfy the demand of politicians, they start to bring in weaker and weaker cases and end up raiding the homes of completely innocent people.

I think it's important to understand this indirect mechanism; it's not the mad man shouting mad orders, it's a gradual slow erosion of every institution that ultimately leads to this in Hungary. The gradual nature of this process makes it difficult to properly identify, and by the time you cross a clear red line like arresting people for critical Facebook posts, it's very difficult to turn back. I began my career 20 years ago and, in my opinion, this is the most difficult time for Hungarian media and free speech in general since the democratic transition of 1989. In a crisis like this, it's almost inevitable for governments to gain more power and in Hungary this extra power is used to further restrict the space for independent media and free speech.

Khadija Patel: Thank you very much Peter and I think that you've illustrated the point that these laws cannot be viewed in isolation because they have such a chilling effect on democracy in general and people's ability to express themselves. That it is something that we have to consider more thoughtfully. Courtney, I'm going to start with you because there is a question for you about your map and why you don't have any data recorded for Turkey? Could you respond to that?

Courtney Radsch: Sure. What I showed was a static map. On our website we have a more interactive map that plots a lot of the incidents that we have reported on. I'm also looking on our website and just in the past month, we've reported on the trials that journalists are under, the asset seizures, all the cases against journalists, the compromised institutions. We just did a press freedom mission that was largely virtual with some people on the ground in Turkey, because it really is one of the most challenging places to be a journalist and consistently leads as one of the world's leading jailer of journalists. Turkey passed a very restrictive social media law earlier, but just went into effect that we are really concerned about what its impact is going to be on journalists and informal citizen journalists as well.

We've seen the threats of asset seizures from Can Dundar, one of Turkey's leading journalists, an award-winning journalist, the convictions under a national security law. I could go on and on about Turkey, there's definitely no shortage of cases. I would say in terms of the snapshot, it is during a period of time, so go on the website, explore that, but we do have country pages that documents every country, and I can tell you, Turkey is one of the ones that I struggled to keep updated on, because there's so much coming out of there.

Khadija Patel: Courtney, you said you recently undertook a press freedom mission to Turkey, as someone who also goes on press freedom missions and hasn't gone into press freedom missions this year, largely because of COVID, tell us a little bit about how the pandemic has also affected advocacy for media freedom.

Courtney Radsch: It's been challenging. I have to say, on the one hand Zoom or whatever platform-based events are great, because you can include potential participants that wouldn't ordinarily get together, more people can hear and listen to them and ask questions, which I think has real benefits. On the other hand, when we can't meet in person with government officials or have those in-person missions to meet with journalists, to hear from them directly about what's happening, to send a signal to a repressive government that there is a vigilant international community watching and supporting their local journalists and attempting to hold them to account. We're seeing it's become very challenging as journalists, as we are limited in our ability to go out and we are not having the same types of meetings that we had, but I will say that we have continued, in places like the United States and Europe that do regularly consult with civil society as they have done, they have moved some of that into a virtual setting.

We have continued to do some briefings, for example, with the State Department on specific countries of concern, with the European Union and the members of Parliament there it's a little bit harder to do advocacy because how can you stand out from everything else that people are dealing with? The biggest focus for us this year has been on getting journalists who are jailed out of prison because it could amount to a death sentence. You can't socially isolate, many of them don't have access to masks, the proper sanitation requirements, so at this point, imprisoning journalists for their work amounts to political prisoners, and they need to be released immediately. We garnered a coalition of more than 180 organizations around the world, and many of them were already working in their own countries. We just need to show the world and every country that has journalists in jail that they need to let these journalists out, especially if you're on pre-trial detention. There was a journalist in Egypt who just died of COVID-19 in pre-trial detention. That is just criminal.

We wrote to the UN Secretary-General and asked him to make this a top priority, he emailed us back a letter. Since there was no UN General Assembly this year, we couldn't hold a protest, so it's definitely changed things. If anything, we're busier than ever, because we're not spending time travelling here and there, so, there are pros and cons.

Khadija Patel: For another follow up from there, converting these meetings that are often difficult at the best of times, for example, if you take the Turkish government, I would imagine

that some of those meetings are downright hostile, considering the pandemic, have you felt a softening at all from authorities or are you seeing them more indifferent to journalists?

Courtney Radsch: I would say that many countries, despite repression, are very good at speaking the terminology of the international norms and international human rights laws, so it's like 1984 doublespeak or newspeak. I wouldn't say we have a lot of openly hostile meetings, we definitely stick it to them, but many authorities are well versed in how to speak this language of international rights, even though it may not translate into anything meaningful on the ground.

Khadija Patel: I wondered whether the pandemic has led to any softening in the attitudes?

Courtney Radsch: No. I think if anything, it has provided cover for crackdowns that either were already in place or that authorities were waiting for an excuse to do. There have been a few cases, for example, of critical journalists who were already in the crosshairs, who the government did finally target because they could use the excuse of COVID. It was really hard with terrorism, when you're trying to defend a journalist and they're being accused of terrorism, it's equally as hard in a health pandemic, potentially even harder, because individuals, the public feels it in their own life and so there seems to be a lot more leeway given to governments, to control information, to restrict access, to set the rules of the game, who gets to go out, who gets accreditation, all of those things, and everything related to that. Yes, I think it's become harder.

People want to prevent the virus; they want to get back to normal life. A lot of people aren't able to or want to push back on these surveillance regimes that are being rolled out. They don't want to wait until the human rights impact assessments are done or until those safeguards are put in place and therefore, I think it's provided a serious and significant cover for authoritarian and democratic governments and regimes.

Khadija Patel: Thanks very much. I've got a question for you Peter from Paula. She asked, "Do you think that the current mass protest and the Hungarian government's move to impose static control over the University of Theater and Film Art, could mark a turning point in public opposition to the government's attempts to curtail freedom of expression?"

Peter Erdelyi: I'm not too optimistic, unfortunately. This has been going on for over a month now. It lasted a lot longer than I personally expected it to and I really admire the efforts of the students and the teachers at the university, but I don't think that this is an issue that goes beyond Budapest and this is again, one of the issues I'm sure is concerning for some people that this is happening, but with rising unemployment and other very serious life-and-death issues for a lot of people, I think it's just not their priority. I don't see that this can go on and obviously it's very unpredictable what's going to happen, but right now there's no incentive for the government to crack down on this, they can just let this go. It's not really threatening their rule over anything. The students are protesting and in the university buildings they hold their own classes. I don't see this as gathering more momentum that it already has, but I'm not an expert on what this is, so this is just my very subjective assessment.

Khadija Patel: Thanks very much. Meera, we just heard from Peter, I think many of us have followed events in Hungary in recent years from a distance and noted egregious violations of human rights. But the way he's actually illustrated the control of information in the

public sphere is really scary and, so on the one hand, we've got this documented tendency around the world for governments to act in an authoritarian manner and impose restrictions on the way the press does its work. And on the other hand, the pandemic has also been an existential threat to independent media as well commercially, and we are only likely to see the effects of this in the coming months and perhaps over the next year. I know in South Africa, nearly every newsroom had to take salary cuts. There were mass layoffs and no one's out of the woods yet. The truth is that the economy may take a long time to actually bounce back, so we have this possibility then of all our news either being controlled by a handful of billionaires on one hand, who can afford to buy up big titles as an ego project and on the other hand, authoritarian regimes who just want to cement power, so what do we do?

Meera Selva:

I wish I knew, but you're absolutely right. This is the big thing: the media industry has been in crisis for a good decade, the advertising model is broken, we haven't yet figured out what model is going to replace it, independent journalism is getting harder and harder to pay for itself. It's something that's happened and has been happening for the last few years and my institute that is at the core of what we do —try and find ways and look at ways that the industry could continue to survive and move forward. The pandemic has accelerated a lot of change that was happening anyway, so organizations that were struggling financially have just collapsed. You are right that hundreds of thousands of journalists have been laid off worldwide, the advertising revenue model, which was falling anyway, has again plummeted because we're not out and about and spending so what would advertisers be paying for?

On top of that, you've got the other trend that has also been happening, which is a disaggregation of news, where it's conceived by social media, on platforms that aren't controlled by the news agencies. It becomes hard for people to know who's giving them the information they're reading and therefore what are they paying for? Who monetizes this? It is an ongoing trend that absolutely has been hastened. What we saw in the immediate aftermath of the crisis was a lot of emergency funds, the internees, LuminAID, lots of foundations jumped in and said, "We need to get emergency funding to newsrooms just to get them to survive." So, this is the equivalent of the government furlough schemes that have just kept people going through the lockdown.

There have been these temporary and short-lived infusions but the amount of money that can be disbursed through these schemes is not going to solve the problem, but it might carry them through a few months and crucially, it might raise awareness of the fact they exist and raise awareness of the dangers here. If you're saying this industry is on its knees, I think we absolutely need to rethink what is journalism for? Who is it for? I said at the beginning, at the start of the crisis, there was an uptick in journalism everywhere, because people knew that they needed good reliable information, and they needed scientific explanations. They needed the coronavirus explained to them in the way journalists can explain with graphics and data, interactive graphics and specifics to that audience, so that was all very needed.

We need to keep hold of the kernel of that need and build on that. Therefore, we need to carry on producing good journalism and absolutely look at who it's for. I think this is where I keep talking about the relationship with readers and trust,

because this ultimately comes down to the issue of whether journalism will survive. It'll only survive if people need it, feel that it's trustworthy and that it's giving them something they need. If it's not, it will not survive no matter what we do at our end to tweak the business model or net revenue streams. The first thing is to say, how do we do trustworthy journalism? Part of this comes down to good, reliable journalism, impartial journalism. A lot of it is through diversity, who's been telling the stories?

There was a very good reporter earlier this month who did a story on women disappearing on coverage of COVID 19 news. It suddenly became a very male space, male politicians, male directors of public health, male scientists, and women were quoted as case studies as victims, but women's voices were really taken out of the story. And when you consider that most women, most health-care workers tend to be women, especially at the nursing level, most caregivers are women. The lockdown and the childcare duties fell disproportionately on women. It's a complete failure of the media to have allowed the space to become completely male dominated so early on. These are the kinds of things we need to fundamentally look at and then the second thing is who pays for journalism? Is there a model that the readers pay directly? That it's a public subsidy? That it should be supported by foundations? Do we need a different tax structure for news organizations so that they're treated more akin to charities than private businesses, for example? They're given more tax breaks? That's a wider conversation that needs to happen, but that needs to happen across society because that would involve fundamental policy change on how we view independent journalism. Before we have that, we need to make sure that there's a strong, good connection with audiences, viewers and readers.

Courtney Radsch:

Can I just build on what Meera has, amazingly, hit on so many really critical points. Just to go back to earlier what you were saying about the impact on news organizations. We're hearing from journalists that this could be an extinction event for journalism. Unpacking how the economic impact of coronavirus is going to impact the news industry has to do with advertising, it has to do with all of the rest of the economy, of course. But I just shared in the chat, look at freelancers. Freelancers have seen their livelihoods decimated. You pointed out very importantly about the importance of journalism reporting on COVID, but that compounds the problem of the news hole. For several months, and even now, it's hard to report on anything that isn't about coronavirus.

What does that do to reporting on other public interest issues, on issues of corruption, on human rights, on women. Any issue has to have a COVID angle to even get through. That has huge potential societal implications. The importance of local media, of course, we hear these great anecdotes about how *The New York Times* has seen a rise in subscriptions, but my guess is, CBJ doesn't track this, we read the great research produced by the Reuters Institute and others, but it seems to me that that is the exception, not the rule. We have seen local news being devastated. Of course, if you can't afford to pay journalists or freelancers to cover those communities, these people are never going to meet a journalist. They're not going to see journalism and why it matters to their daily lived experiences.

When you talk about women, that's fascinating. I didn't see that study, but it is really concerning. Compounded with that is, and again, this is not our research, but I think the International Women's Media Foundation and other groups that focus

more on gender have seen that women journalists are increasingly also having to do the childcare duties or the educational duties or take up the home house-care duties. That's having an impact on who is actually making and doing the news in terms of journalism and producers. Again, I feel like we've touched on 500 topics here because the conditions created are so challenging and, just to the last point about the economic model for press freedom perspective, I think that if we think about pluralism as a guiding principle for how we funded the media, that you want a variety of different types of media support.

You want the private corporate sponsor advertising-driven media, but you also need public-interest media. You need publicly funded media, foundation, all sorts of different models so that you have different impetuses for doing journalism for what they're focused on, how they're funded and how those funders do or do not influence their editorial line. But we also want to make sure that we're not, and this is just my personal opinion, but if you only rely on foundations to fund certain types of journalism, then they're going to decide what they think is important. At some point I personally would like some journalists to decide what we as journalists think is important. Again, it goes back to the principle of pluralism as one of the key components of what we need economically, but also to ensure press freedom.

Meera Selva: Absolutely. Just one point about the foundations,

Khadija Patel: Go ahead Meera.

Meera Selva: The other thing about foundations is they tend to be effective. The ones with the most money tend to be large international organizations. If you're talking about trust and relationships with the community, often a kind of foundation-funded organization is treated with hostility and suspicion for a good long time by the local community. Also crucially, you don't want that to crush what local journalism and local news might be produced to that as well.

Khadija Patel: I guess Hungary is a very good example of that. With the campaign against Soros, for example it's a very stark example of some of the dangers of donor-funded journalism. I guess on the other hand, what we are struggling to do is build credibility for what we do. I often tell the story of once moderating a panel about xenophobia at Wits University, which is a university in Johannesburg. We've got a huge problem with xenophobic violence in South Africa, and we have these spurts of violence against foreign nationals every few months or every few years. Because xenophobic sentiment is also so pronounced, it is a very difficult subject to navigate.

So, we were having this very difficult discussion when a young man in the audience put his hand up and says, "Okay, I have nothing to say about xenophobia. I just want to speak to you," and at that time I was the *Mail & Guardian* editor-in-chief and the young man says, "I love your publication and it does great work. Why is it so expensive? I can't afford it. The *Mail & Guardian* is the most expensive newspaper in the country.

I listen to him and he was very passionate about this, and then I told him that I also have journalists, real people who have children and rent to pay and really need to be generating some kind of revenue in order to keep doing this. And the remarkable thing is that at that moment he hadn't actually thought of us, as the *Mail &*

Guardian as a group of people, but rather as just a thing, and I could almost see this awakening on his face when he realized, “Oh, people also need to eat.” That’s one of the struggles that we have, to show our human face to our audiences and hope that somehow builds trust. Peter, do you feel that would work at all in Hungary?

Peter Erdelyi:

I am, especially on the funding front, right now optimistic. Maybe yesterday I was more pessimistic about any changes. What happened with us is the digital advertising market collapsed in the spring, pretty much completely. And this was our main source of revenue. So obviously that hit us really hard. We had to, as many others did, introduce a round of cost-cutting measures. We didn’t fire anyone, but there was a decrease in salaries and so forth. But then in late March, we turned to our audience. We have a voluntary donation program that has been going since 2017, and it’s become an increasingly important source of revenue for 444. And it grew. In April, we got twice as much money as we had from the beginning of the year. Even though our readers are not exempt from the economic effects of the pandemic, they still thought it’s important for them to fund journalism and that was real money, and that money meant that we didn’t have to fire anyone.

In fact, later during the summer, after the government took over Index, there was another huge influx of reader revenue. It was so strange because usually we think about these things, sometimes in a very technical way, when something happens, you need to launch a campaign. You need to make sure to send a message to your readers. There are things you need to do to get people to donate money to you. And it’s part of my job or part of our job. But when Index collapsed, without us saying a word about it, beyond reporting on the how it was unfolding, but without us saying anything about please support us because we don’t want to end up where they ended up, there was a lot of people who consciously chose to, the day the editor-in-chief resigned, to put in a recurring payment to support us, to send us a letter, to tell us how they are going to support us from then on.

For us, this was a really positive experience with everything that was problematic with the law and some of the stuff that the government was doing. But we found that our community is willing to support us to and even greater extent than before. I did not think that was possible, but here we are. On the other hand, when we spoke about how the pandemic accelerated some of the stuff that was already going on, we were going to launch a membership program and obviously we needed to accelerate that, and now we have this impossible dilemma. We find that all around the world that lies are usually free where the truth is usually something you have to pay for it.

How do we navigate this dilemma in a country where the government very consciously is working to cut people off real information? We need to find sustainability for ourselves to continue to pay our journalists. Therefore, we need to get money from our readers because there’s no paid advertising market to speak of. But on the other hand, if we do that and we begin producing content exclusive to people who can pay, that means cutting off a lot of people, even if our intentions are completely different than those in the governments, we are still propelling the same thing, that we are making the truth more expensive and leaving lies to be free. This is what we are struggling with now, and while it’s good to have a lot of community support, and it really helped us big time to survive right now, we need to figure out how to navigate this dilemma.

Khadija Patel: Meera, how do we navigate this very treacherous terrain? It is a difficult question because everything is uncertain. In Europe, various stages of new lockdowns are happening with new implications for the economy and certainly with the viability of news media, but with that as well, new pressures on the media coming from governments, trying to control certain messages. At the same time, we think about this year and so much has happened. The huge Black Lives Matter protests that started in the United States, which resonated through so much of the world. In South Africa, we've had a huge awakening moment to the scourge of gender-based violence, for example. So much has happened in this year and everything feels very, very uncertain. It's almost impossible for us to plan beyond pockets of three months. It's then impossible for us to also think about what does the media look like in three months or six months or nine months? If you were advising journalists around the world, how would you say we actually navigate this next period?

Meera Selva: I think there's a top-down and a bottom-up response to this and the top-down response is especially very pertinent to Hungary, Poland, countries in the European Union that are facing a systematic dismantling of independent media with a weaponization of advertising revenue in malicious legislation, malicious lawsuits. This is a deliberate and sustained attack on journalism that uses the courts, that uses parliaments. And they're doing it while they are part of the European Union. I think it's fairly clear that, as Courtney said, some of this has to be about holding governments to account and saying it's about lobbying, it's about protesting, it's about saying these kinds of behaviours should not be permitted. If you want to be part of this trading block, if you want to be part of this community and the benefits that entails, then you have to buy into the idea of an independent press and you have to buy into the idea of journalism and rights for journalists.

I think that's a very top-down effect where there's been quite a lot of good movement. But from the conference last year in London on defending media freedom co-hosted by the British and the Canadian governments, that's sustained some government actions to highlight this issue. That absolutely needs to be increased with the support of organizations like the CPG. That's the very top-down response to this. Then the bottom-up response is much more complex. First, saying don't make things worse. In trying to fix problems, don't make things worse and the Black Lives Matters movement is a very interesting case study because it's a movement that grew and sustained itself and still sustains itself on social media — on Twitter, on Facebook pages, but especially on Twitter. The mainstream media came to the topic quite late in the day.

This had been something that had been led by activists and civil society via social media. We talked earlier about a lot of legislation that's quite draconian misinformation laws. What we see in Hungary and Turkey is that you're absolutely right. It's about trying to stop all debate because again, the governments know what they're doing here. They're trying to say in the name of stopping misinformation, disinformation, we will produce laws that attack, not just journalism, but civil society as a whole. As journalists, we just need to be careful what we're asking for when we ask about how to stop hate speech, laws to stop hate speech and laws to shut down certain debates. You need to be careful that you don't accidentally kill off civil society in doing so as well.

Courtney Radsch: I think on the one hand, that's definitely true and we should be paying attention also, for example, in the United States to protest laws, to NGO laws, which we've seen around the world being used to restrict that. But yes, sometimes there's an attempt to tamper debate and prevent any sort of debate. I think that the new tactic, because that is also a tried-and-true tactic, but the new tactic that we're seeing is the attempt to drown out debate and make it impossible to have debate because there's so much information. There's a flood of irrelevant information, disinformation, propaganda, which, because we also rely so much on algorithmically mediated platforms that have been designed to promote or amplify certain types of materials, makes it very difficult for journalism to compete.

And, as has been alluded to, and clearly in Hungary being a lead case, where you've got a lot of mainstream media or traditional media organizations that are owned by, either directly by the state or political cronies of those in power who just support those. We've seen here in the United States, for example, that certain media outlets, especially those with a dominant local media market have come out in support of a specific candidate. And in many countries, that's not unusual. In France, their political parties, and Lebanon, they're associated with media already. But the point is that this drowning out of any legitimate debate and the challenge then of journalism and journalists breaking through with useful or relevant information is I think an increasing challenge that we're seeing.

Meera Selva: This is what Jay Rosen calls flooding the zone, which is just throwing absolutely everything out there. That is what journalists are meant to deal with. We're meant to say, we will be the people who sort out this morass of truth and lies presented to you in a way that is useful.

Courtney Radsch: Or just data, because there's a lot of information out there, but I think journalists, and this goes back earlier in the discussion, journalists can be very useful by helping figure out what to focus on, what in that morass of information is important, but they also have to keep digging because sometimes the information you get is not the information you need to make sense of everything. If you look at examples like the Paradise Papers and the Panama Papers and these big collaborative journalism products that revealed all sorts of interesting insights and corruption, it's not like those stories were obvious in the documents. They had to go through a lot of work to turn that raw data into information, into stories. We need journalists more than ever, and they need to do more things than ever, whether it's ferreting out what the story is or making sense of all of the information that's surrounding us.

Khadija Patel: We're what, two weeks away from the US election? And we cannot talk about media freedom and COVID-19 without actually talking a little bit about the United States and what the potential for media freedom in the United States is with the election. I think it was a Bloomberg report earlier today that said that they had checked data and more and more people are buying gas masks and riot equipment in the United States so there seems to be some kind of underlying fear of all hell breaking loose in some quarters. Is the media going to be okay through that if it indeed happens?

Courtney Radsch: This is a very interesting time. I live in Washington, DC. I also went down to the protests and saw for myself how so much law enforcement, including undefined federal-level agencies were deployed. So, I'm not surprised by those reports. We

are certainly preparing and helping journalists prepare for ongoing and potentially expanded protests and demonstrations. Of course, we're not, regardless of the outcome of the election, focused on that, but we want to make sure that journalists can cover what's happening, whether that's at the ballot box or in the streets, or online safely to the greatest extent possible. We have a whole dedicated safety kit called Press Safety 2020, which is on our website that is designed for reporters that are covering the US election.

It includes partnerships with groups such as Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, which will have lawyers on the ground in certain cities. And it has an illegal hotline, just trying to get that out to reporters, including international reporters because the US election is an international story as well as a local story. It's going to be interesting. We definitely want journalists to be prepared with the right personal protective equipment, whether that's for covering protests or covering COVID. Now, of course, you need to be looking at both of those. We also have a COVID safety advisory, which has been updated into 40 languages. We update that on a bi-weekly basis, so definitely be prepared. And really the best thing a journalist can do to make sure that they're prepared is to do a risk assessment, understand the story that you're covering, your assignment, what are the potential risks, both in terms of physical, digital, psychosocial, do you anticipate online harassment? Do you need specific personal protective equipment? And we actually have a template for a risk assessment on our website.

You can also go to Akos Alliance, a culture of safety alliance that we work together with very closely, and a lot of other groups just putting out resources. If there's any question that isn't answered by those resources, we have an "ask the expert" feature. It is definitely something we've mobilized for in a way that is pretty unusual for the United States, but we have done this in other countries as well. We did specific election programming in South Africa, Nigeria, India and elsewhere, where we see elections. Our times of tension, often protesters and journalists are at the forefront.

Khadija Patel: Peter, from Hungary looking out, what for you is the most concerning international development on press freedom right now?

Peter Erdelyi: Beyond Hungary, I think we are looking at the US elections too. It's one of those things where the Trump administration has a special relationship with the Orban government, which is, I think, no surprise to anyone who's looked at any of these people closely enough. For us, it was really strange how after the 2016 election Trump came to office, the official foreign policy of the United States changes very slowly and gradually, and the Hungarian government had a bad relationship with the Obama administration and the embassy people were really vocal about press freedom issues, and so forth. And that went on for maybe a year and a half after Trump took office. But when the Trump administration sent the new ambassador, and when certain levels of people change in the State Department, the US became completely silent on this issue. I'm wondering, even if Trump's out of office, how long would it take with such a massive administration, and all these institutions, do you think to find Hungary on the map again, and to maybe voice some opinions on issues related to us?

It was pretty strange I think that it was a year after Trump took office, the State Department had a call, like a tender, out for local media in Hungary. This really pissed off the Hungarian government since they spent a lot of money acquiring every local media outlet there is in Hungary. So, they were really upset about the Trump government trying to give money to all these independent initiatives to fund. And then that was withdrawn, and I think that was a turning point. From that time on, it was very much in line with what Prime Minister Orbán wanted. We'll see how long it will take for the United States to get back into whatever they were doing prior to Trump.

Courtney Radsch: If I can just build on that. The normative fabric to uphold press freedom and international human rights broadly, is in tatters. Regardless of what the outcome of the election is, that is not going to suddenly be rewoven because you have somebody different in office, and it's going to take a lot of work to repair and recreate the normative fabric that we've done over the past several decades to create international human rights standards, and those norms are already contested. Would the United States rejoin the Human Rights Council, rejoin UNESCO, all of these other institutions, because even if you have on day two the president speaking out in defence of press freedom, how is that going to have any weight if there aren't anti-actions to support that? I think that the destruction done through the deterioration of norms, and especially the whole fake news enemy of the people rhetoric, which has been accompanied by real policies in many countries, is going to take a long time to undo.

Khadija Patel: Courtney, I suppose what the Trump administration has taught us is that a lot of good work can be undone in an administration within only a couple of years of that administration. Even if a Biden administration happens and does some repair work, it could again be undone by Trump Jr. in another five years. And I guess this is why the United States is not a reliable actor when it comes to the issues of advocating for human rights and democracy elsewhere in the world. Very recently the US embassy in Dar es Salaam in Tanzania released a statement about upcoming elections.

They're noting that there are tensions in the country and urge all sections of society to remain calm and peaceful. A lot of Africans found great mirth in that statement because, and I think there was one particular writer who turned that around and said here's my spoof letter from the African Union to the United States cautioning the US on tensions in their own backyard ahead of the election and cautioning them about protecting the rights of the press. I guess that's what the United States has lost now. It relaxes the moral authority.

Courtney Radsch: I think there's always been a contested moral authority. I am also a scholar of international relations. I've thought about this very deeply, but there's always a large degree of hypocrisy and multiple different interests that the United States has. The Obama administration on the one hand spoke about press freedom, met with civil society groups in advance of trips for example to Ethiopia, where he then met with say, independent journalists or bloggers, and on the other hand he also oversaw drone attacks outside of the framework of international law, and there were more prosecutions of whistleblowers, and the use of the espionage act that implicates journalists than any other administration combined. And he oversaw a mass surveillance regime that was then also used to target journalists.

Again, there's always a degree of states and governments that are multi-facilitated and have many interests, but typically traditionally including, for example, under the Bush administration, again a democracy promotion agenda, the devastating Iraq War, and the war on terror that had all sorts of repercussions. But traditionally, the United States has seen as part of its interest, the upholding of international norms, and the perpetuation of things like press freedom, which we just don't really see anymore from either the president or Pompeo. Maria Ressa is a Filipino-American journalist facing serious charges in the Philippines, and we have not seen the United States come out strongly in support of her.

She's an American citizen as well as a Filipina citizen, and this has huge repercussions for journalists around the world, not because the United States was going to sweep in and save them, but there were cases where we saw an impact of the US or the UK raising specific cases of journalists that could then mean that they would get better treatment and prison, that they would get a family visit at the very least and maybe would prompt an investigation into a murder, and that's just a lot harder under this administration. It's not just the United States, it's also the United Kingdom, which decided to launch this big global media freedom campaign in conjunction with Canada to get all of this press about their commitment to media freedom. Yet on the other hand breaking international law, not actually doing anything that has an impact to improve media freedom. We don't see them speaking out for example, on Saudi Arabia, which has a devastating record. We don't see them taking up the mantle of pursuing justice for Jamal Khashoggi's murder when the United States has just let that go by the wayside.

There's a lot of hypocrisy around the world unfortunately, and we just have not seen any government come in and take up the mantle that the United States has let drop.

Khadija Patel:

I think that's a nice segue to a question we've got in the Q and A box. Any of the panellists can respond to it. For some reason post COVID-19, I see the rise and consolidation of state-backed and run news media in in the Global South. I also see the rise of more repressive governments. How do you see the state of government-funded media post COVID-19, and the role of independent journalism? Any of you want to take that?

Meera Selva:

I can take that because I recognize the name — it's Alvin Newton Bonnie from Botswana, who was also a journalist fellow at the Institute about two years ago, and I was referring to him earlier when I talked about foundation-funded journalism, because he quite rightly pointed out some of the risks and pitfalls of relying on foundation-funded journalism, if you are a small investigative start-up in Southern Africa, for example. How do I see the state of government-funded media post COVID-19? I think problematic, and we talked about this earlier as well, but what I've seen is that it seems to coincide with an idea of a nationalist narrative. On one hand you get outright propaganda being blunt from Chinese state-sponsored media from CGTN aimed at the English-speaking world.

Posts coverage in English present coronavirus in a very China-positive way and highlights how well China is doing while highlighting how bad other countries are doing. It's just framing the narrative in a certain way, but you also see, again, in the United Kingdom, the government using this opportunity to launch a very

concerted and sustained attack on the credibility of the BBC, and threats to its funding model and threats to its independence, and raising up a mob against public service broadcasting, urging the public to be mistrustful of the public sector, take the broadcasting they're paying for. I think this is very, very dangerous, and the future of independent journalism now that you know as much as we do because I think it's undoubtedly important.

Khadija Patel:

I think it's summed up to be crucial. I think Courtney was right about the loss of local journalism and exactly the moment that we need local news, because this is absolutely the news that's vital. It's what's happening in your neighbourhood, and again, in the UK though, the restrictions are so local, but only what's happening in the streets around you. It's relevant to you because what's happening in the next town is completely different. We absolutely need hyper-local information right now as a society, and it'd be good to see more independent journalism as I get the feeling that there's a desperate need for that.

Anyone else want to comment?

Peter Erdelyi:

Just very quickly, I think that we'll see more state-sponsored journalism just by nature, as some outlets go out of business there will be more opportunities and they will always want more influence, more control over information, and their resources are a magnitude or a few magnitudes larger than private entities. It was mentioned before how state funds or public funding can be beneficial to journalism. There's a similar debate on what's best. If Facebook is to be governed by itself, where states are led to govern by Facebook, and I think in Western Europe, in my experience, that debate is over. Most people think that states should be responsible for governing Facebook to the greater expense. Whereas in Central Europe, if I think about our government governing or regulating Facebook more than Facebook regulates itself, it's not a good thought, and I think there's a divide here with state funding as well.

I can't see any type of state funding as beneficial because our relationship with our state is fundamentally different than a journalist in Germany or the Netherlands, or even the United Kingdom. I think people hear the lesson over the past 30 years is the tradition was the more state funding there is in journalism, the worse the bias, that is the more partisan it is and therefore, I don't see that, but maybe it will work eventually here too.

Khadija Patel:

We've got just a few minutes left, and we cannot possibly end this panel on such a down note. Where do you find hope right now, Peter?

Peter Erdelyi:

In our community. The thing is we are being attacked quite often by this huge government media sphere, and their sort of fan base or trolls or whatever, and it's when you're constantly surrounded by these voices, it has an effect on you. But sometimes it's good to reach out to your own readers to read the letters people send you, and to look at the support you get, even in a time of crisis, and for me, all in all it makes me optimistic more than pessimistic about our future.

It's an incredibly challenging time, and what's happening right now or tomorrow can be completely different. If there can be another wave of the disease, there can be even more serious economic crisis. It's all very volatile, but I think it's always worth talking to your readers, reaching out to them, trying to put some institutions in place

to have a community to get feedback because most of it is, at least in my experience, positive, and you can draw a lot of strength from it.

Khadija Patel: I agree. Meera you spoke about hope early this year in the first stages of the pandemic outside of China. I think nearly all of us saw record numbers of people on our websites. I was going to sleep with my phone in one hand, just looking at Google analytics with a smile on my face, because it was such a beautiful thing to see, and that gave me hope because as one of the panellists said that in this really curious moment in human history, people understood the value of good information, and they actively sought us out for that. That gave me hope, and what gives you hope?

Meera Selva: I think that kind of uptake, and the fact that people did, in the time of crisis, turn to journalism. It's almost like when a child is scared, they turn to their mother. It was just like this instinctive reaction to go to the cluster brands that they recognized, and look for information, and that desire for news, if it could be buried and lost, and there's so much demand for our attention. There are so many more appealing things to do online than follow the news, that all this is going to be harmful, but there is that demand there. Going back to answering Alvin's question about independent journalists is that there's a lot of new journalism as well.

There's a lot of people, a lot of communities that never saw the news as representing them, creating their own news, creating their own websites, creating their own investigative journalism. You're getting more journalists that are diverse. You're getting journalism that's more innovative. The kind of the tech revolution that's someone hand-crushing journalists, and in this crisis in journalism also creating a space for what I think will be the future of journalism. I think that there is hope, but it really won't be easy to remember the purge festival again, in the sense of nostalgia.

I can't remember the speaker, but the imagery stuck with me and said, this is like 40 years in the wilderness. You know how the people wandered under Moses for 40 years in the wilderness, and you figure out what's important to you when you spend 40 years in the wilderness, you decide what you keep. So leavened bread, we can live without it. We can eat flatbread. The things that are fundamental to you, you carry through the desert because you'll need them when you set up a new place. I think that's where we are. We need to think about what we can jettison, and it might be painful because we may have quite enjoyed eating soft bread, but we keep the things that are core to us.

Khadija Patel: That's a fantastic answer Meera, thank you. Courtney, what gives you hope?

Courtney Radsch: I don't think it should have ended with me. I am really struggling right now to find the silver lining, because going back to what we were talking about earlier, one of the silver linings of working in this domain, where you are working on some pretty tough issues on a day-to-day basis was getting to meet some of the journalists that we helped get out of prison or meeting the families of the journalists who were trying to get justice when their family members were murdered because of their journalism, and you don't get to do that anymore because we're not in person.

I'm going to maybe try to get some hope from what Meera said, but I'm just very wary about hoping too much, having written my doctoral dissertation, my book about the so-called Arab Spring, and the uprising, and I had a lot of hope after

spending years on the ground with these young people, and many of them are behind bars or in exile. I think we have to stay strong. We have to really support journalists. We have to stand up for press freedom. We need to keep our nose to the grindstone and try to find those rays of hope. But I know for me, it's just that I find hope in the day-to-day work that I do because at least I'm not doom scrolling, but what Meera said, the innovative new ideas that are coming out, the individual journalists who are finding ways to keep going, and media outlets that are finding new models and innovations.

Khadija Patel:

I guess it's a call for eternal vigilance really on society, but also on our existence on media freedom itself, but also hopefully a call on all of us for resilience. The world would be an intolerable place without a free media, and it's something that we have to protect. We cannot fathom ourselves without an independent media. We just have to brush ourselves off and keep fighting. Thank you to everybody who has joined us, and thanks to those who asked some really lovely questions. I wish we could give a huge round of applause for these panelists because you guys have all been fantastic. This has been a great conversation. Thank you so much. And all the best to all of you.



JOURNALISM IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

DONOR RESPONSES TO SUPPORTING INDEPENDENT MEDIA IN TIMES OF CRISIS

PANEL

Moderator: Mark Nelson, Center for International Media Assistance
Speakers: Simon Collard-Wexler, Global Affairs Canada; James Deane, BBC Media Action;
Mira Milosevic, Global Forum for Media Development; Marjorie Rouse, Internews;
Joy Chelagat, Internews; Alex Jakana, Gates Foundation

Mark Nelson:

Hello everyone. My name is Mark Nelson. I'm the Senior Director for the Center for International Media Assistance at the National Endowment for Democracy. I want to welcome you to this important conversation we're going to have this afternoon as part of the Journalism in the Time of Crisis conference.

This particular panel is going to be looking at donor responses to supporting independent media during this crisis that we are going through, and the crisis that we're talking about is not only the COVID-19 crisis that has created quite an important challenge to the media sector, but to the ongoing and I would say equally complex and difficult crisis that the media sectors across the world were already going through before this crisis hit.

So we're going to be looking at both of those things, at the immediate situation caused by COVID-19 and some of the really difficult things that the media sector is facing across the world and we're going to be looking at the post-crisis environment and what we can do to use this moment in time as perhaps a launching point into new strategies for working together to deal with the ongoing problems that we know exist in the media sector.

I wanted to start by throwing a question out there about why are we talking about donors in the media sector? Why do we even care about this? As many of you know, international bilateral donors contribute about \$150 billion a year for international development and private philanthropic organizations like the Gates Foundation, Luminate, the Ford Foundation, they contribute another very significant amount of money to helping developing countries deal with problems, manage reforms, combat poverty, and deal with health and education issues.

Increasingly, media is seen as one of the key elements that need to be supported in countries that are going through a developmental process and it has become a recognized area for donor action. Donors are often really critical not only to helping media find a pathway toward reform and change, but also just to day-to-day survival, because in this environment that we're living in right now, donor funding is a critical part of this equation about how independent media can survive in the developing world.

The media was in a real crisis before the COVID-19 pandemic struck. This has exacerbated a series of things that were going on in the media that are very difficult for journalists and independent voices across the world to manage. Countries were losing support from their populations and from their governments for independent media and the political crisis that the media faces in some countries is really quite serious. Trust in the media has declined and people don't necessarily think of the media as a critical part of their environment.

Another thing is media capture, the second important issue. Media capture is when a government or a wealthy businessman, and this is by far the most important part of media capture, wealthy oligarchs and businesspeople buying media to influence public opinion. That is the dominant ownership model of media in many countries across the world and that is a growing way that the media is being structured through that kind of captured ownership structure.

The third major issue is the business model itself. As many of you know, the news media has lost its most important link to ad revenue sources in advertising because advertising has been largely captured by the online platforms such as Google, Facebook and Amazon. So, the major revenue source that was really critical to creating independent media for many years is now not a dependable revenue source.

Those three elements of crisis are really something that were exacerbated when the COVID-19 crisis hit. We are finding out through surveys and through conversations with journalists and media organizations around the world that this crisis has become an existential crisis, while there's growing demand for high quality information during this crisis and people are turning to high quality news and information. The ability of news organizations to produce that quality information is really undermined by the fact that their revenue streams have really collapsed and there's growing attacks on journalists and censorship and pressure campaigns by governments against journalists and this has created a real challenge for these organizations to do their work.

In the course of this conversation today, we're going to be talking about two things. This crisis now and what we do about it in the future, and we're going to go around to a group of important speakers and thinkers on this topic. We're extremely lucky to have not only a fantastic panel, but some really good people in the audience who can contribute to this conversation, therefore I'm really looking forward to going through this conversation with you.

I'm going to introduce our panellists as we go. I'm going to start by getting a point of view from the ground in a country that has been critical to setting the agenda for independent media in Africa. Our first speaker is Joy Chelagat who is the Media Business Advisor at Internews based in Nairobi, Kenya. She has been working in this crisis situation in Nairobi writing about what's going on in the media sector and we're going to turn to her to tell us a bit about what's going on right now and how people are dealing with it. Joy, if you could just start your conversation by introducing the challenge that we're facing in this moment of time.

Joy Chelagat:

Hi everyone. My name is Joy Chelagat. I'm a journalist based in Nairobi. I used to work with a media house before the COVID crisis hit and in the middle of that I started working with Internews. What's been quite interesting about the Kenyan situation, I think you adequately introduced it, was that the first thing that happened is last year in Kenya we started seeing a mass firing of journalists.

We saw one media house after the other announcing the firing of journalists and this started last year. There was a great cry last year from media houses and we're talking about national-level media houses, the ones that carry most of the advertising all the way down to community-based stations. That was the crisis situation from last year.

Come the COVID crisis this year, the second thing that happened was that there was a second wave of a mass firings. The Media Council, as of April, said up to 600 employees of media houses, this is journalists, support staff, were fired or they had to take pay cuts. The organization I worked at woke up and decided to announce a 50 percent pay cut. Even the manner in which this was being rolled out heavily affected journalists because in some organizations people would just receive an email telling

them that from this day this is what you have to sign, this document and there's no out clause as a journalist and if you're not going to take it, oh well.

While that was happening, you were finding that newsroom leaders still had to find a way to get the news out there. In the case of where I was working, we had to find out who has laptops, who doesn't have them. This is very interesting, and particularly in the Kenyan and African context, you'll find that oftentimes laptops and machines are not there for everyone, so they often do office sharing. Even when government restrictions came in, it was quite a crisis situation for media houses on the ground in Kenya. Even in terms of sitting arrangements, in terms of ventilation, some of those things were actually practically very difficult in terms of trying to rearrange around the COVID crisis.

What we saw after that is the journalists and their unions went to court and there were back-and-forth court battles. We saw some very key media houses in Kenya not honouring what the court said. Standard Group journalists and KUJ, they said, "This is not right. You cannot wake up; you have to follow a certain procedure if you're going to affect people's pay." Still, despite the courts saying that you guys need to find a way to discuss and agree with your staff, the pay cuts continued. There was the aspect of even the rule of law not being honoured with the journalist union.

Even when unions, strong unions, go to court the laws are not enforced. But as time went on, when the whole media sector realized what was happening and the ad market crashed, we started seeing collections and stakeholder engagements where we found editors skills, the Media Council, all came together and started having conversations about what needs to be done.

Let me just get some numbers here. Prior to the COVID's crisis hitting Kenya, the government, which, brings about 60 percent of the advertising in Kenya, owe the media 2.8 billion Kenya shillings. In US dollars, that is 2.8 million, and while the government is saying that we want to support you guys as essential workers, the other thing that we were seeing was the government not honoring their business obligations to the media; therefore, contributing to media sustainability challenges in the country.

On the other side what we also saw was some of the lobby groups were saying that the government is unwilling to pay because by not paying the media, they would then be beholden to the government and state organizations. So, where's the state right now? What we're seeing right now is media organizations still trying to get used to the habit of working from home. The Standard Group and other organizations are trying to innovate around reader revenue and trying to promote different types of business models and even doing virtual events; they're trying to innovate around that. But the situation is still dire, because the advertising is still not coming in, the media houses are still wondering if there are going to be a second wave of pay cuts and a second wave of redundancies. That's the situation in Kenya.

Mark Nelson: I've got the impression that there is increased demand for the quality journalism that is being produced. Do you feel that the people are challenged?

Joy Chelagat: Yes.

Mark Nelson: Of the media?

Joy Chelagat: That was one of the key things. One of the areas where the media did win in Kenya is the media really pushed the government to lock down flights. While the COVID crisis was happening across the world, Kenya was still having flights coming back and forth and it took the media having an active campaign and we saw lots of editorial pieces pushing the government. The Standard Group had a very beautiful paper and they actually said these are the people who are the traitors of our country, they're selling the country and from there, we saw legal action and the government actually started locking down the Kenya Airways. That was a major win for the media.

We also saw with the ratings of different stations, particularly radio stations, in Kenya saw quite a rise. Particularly those ones who are dealing with COVID programming. When we went and looked at the GeoPoll numbers, what was very interesting is, we had the national broadcast at 3:00 p.m. and we saw lots of people tuning into media and there was a very significant rise in the ratings for media stations. We saw also quite a significant rise in SMS, because in Kenya a lot of people would SMS in questions or they would criticize what the government was doing or what they think should be done.

We also saw a lot of people taking the initiative of reporting what is happening on the ground. One of the things that happened was yes, there was an increase in the interest in media, and what was happening is when people would see things on social media, they would quickly run to media accounts to go and verify and say, "Is this actually true? Where did this come from because there is a lot of disinformation."

One of the things that we did see was there was an increase in consumption of media and even the initial traffic on the websites. Where I was working, we saw about a 20 percent increase in our website traffic and the website traffic really coincided with when we were doing the live streams from the government addresses or when the government was expected to make specific announcements.

Yes, the media did win in that, but I think in Kenya, what really did shift the bar for the media was the fact that they were very keen on putting the pressure on the government to actually put in place restrictions to protect the country.

Mark Nelson: That's great. Well, I think it's similar in many parts of the world, the same kind of peril coming from the crisis and opportunity coming from this increase engagement with audiences and the possibilities.

Sticking with Internews, I'm going to turn to Marjorie Rouse who is Senior Vice President for Programs at Internews and is looking at this issue from the global perspective. I wonder what your findings about this crisis are right now from that global perspective. Marjorie what are you seeing?

Marjorie Rouse: As Joy described, the situation in Kenya is a really good microcosm for what we're seeing in other markets. Most of the media we work with, and we have a team known as News Gang that is really focused in on this specific issue and we've increased our investment in this as an organization because I think there has been an assumption in the health community and other communities and those that do behaviour change communications that these media partners will always just exist.

They're going to be there, and then you can drop your ad revenue in them or your PSA's, but they're facing an existential crisis in COVID. We've been working with a lot of our partners. We had this contradiction; we saw our partners getting two to three times the level of traffic in the first wave of pandemic, especially those local trusted news sources. We're getting a lot of traffic at the same time their advertising was shrinking.

I think Joy mentioned a really important fact, and that is that for many local media, the number one advertiser is the government and government advertising. If they stop paying their bills, you've taken a huge chunk of revenue off the table. We also saw that advertisers were reluctant to advertise next to COVID content, especially early on, which also pushes away revenue. So, you have this juxtaposition of two to three times the eyeballs and most of our outlets saw about an 80 percent drop in revenues and they still haven't recovered. Globally I'd say talking to our News Gang colleagues that they're still down about 45 percent pre COVID.

Since this panel is focused on donors, the media that had some level of donor support in general are weathering this better because they have at least a percentage of their revenue that's not completely vulnerable. For some media, that had been reluctant to go digital or to adapt digital strategies or to look at different ways of generating revenue, this has been a do or die moment.

We actually see media that have been hesitant to adapt becoming adopters because if they don't become adopters at this point, they're not going to necessarily survive. It's a really tough environment and you can't make any assumptions. I think for the larger developing community, those assumptions that it would always be there are broken. These local media, especially the local trusted media in communities, are just really important players in a crisis and they need that sustained ongoing support.

Mark Nelson:

One of the interesting things that we're finding in this crisis is that it's actually a niche of the media. It's not the entire media sector that the international community really is trying to help. Because as I mentioned in my introduction, a lot of the media is captured by unsavory forces and what we're left with is the independent part of the media that can actually receive funding and use it very effectively from donors.

I want to turn to Mira Milosevic who is based in Europe and is working as the Executive Director of the Global Forum for Media Development. This is a coalition of media development organizations and Mira has been part of the ongoing conversation between the organizations that need media development funding and those funders that do that kind of funding, and you've been tracking this crisis and thinking about it from your perspective. What are you seeing in Europe in this field?

Mira Milosevic:

Thank you Mark and thank you everyone for joining us today. What Joy and Marjorie have outlined is exactly what we are seeing in what we call developing and emerging markets and also in the most developed democracies around the world. On one hand, you have partners of groups like Internews that are working in communities. Those are local media, non-profits and media organizations and those have been hit the most both by initial advertising decline that we have seen over the last 15 years, but also by the COVID crisis and those are the outlets that are suffering the most.

For instance, globally, all the digital and the print news publishers will suffer between 25 and 30 percent in advertising revenue decline. But those on the local level will suffer much more. What Marjorie is saying gets up to 80 percent in some cases and we have already seen that in countries like Brazil, which for instance has 30 percent of its population without a single local source of community news, which in the COVID context is life-saving information.

It's similar in Venezuela and other countries, and we have called things in Europe from OCCRP for instance, Investigative Journalism Network that say that thousands of stories in the region go uncovered. On the other hand, from the donor perspective, you mentioned why would donors need to fund media development? Globally, we have agreed in 2015 at the UN level to work towards sustainable development goals and all the donors, they're actually investing their development assistance towards these goals.

We have seen some really good research showing that, for instance, education which is goal 14, equality which is I believe goal 10 and then climate change goal 13, are all really highly correlated with access to information: impartial, truthful and credible information. We will not be able to reach these sustainable goals if we don't have journalists and media that report and cover these issues. That applies also to the COVID crisis. A lot of countries will have many more people die unless they have access to credible and timely information.

Mark Nelson:

It's really a time when we need to draw these conclusions that we're seeing around us and learn from these things that we're learning during this crisis. I think we are learning a lot about how important the donor role is and about what are the most effective ways to do donorship in this field.

I'd like to turn to one of our donors now. Simon Collard Wexler, you are representing Global Affairs Canada, you're Executive Director for Human Rights and Indigenous Affairs Policy. Canada is a major donor in the international system and has been very supportive of the work that we've been doing in this field to raise this issue to the international level, to get bilateral donors to pay attention to this problem and to draw other actors into the process. Simon, can you tell us a little bit about how you're seeing it from the Canadian perspective.

Simon:

Collard-Wexler:

Sure, and thanks for having me. It's great to be here and to have this discussion I think from our point of view, it's tremendously important on a number of levels as I'd like to explain. I'm coming at it from the point of view of a diplomat whose main role is to protect Canada's interests and to promote Canadian values and for both of these, media development is essential.

From something that's very key for Canada, as you might know, we have a feminist foreign policy and a feminist international assistance policy, and media development plays a key role for that because of access to information, freedom of expression, making societies more democratic and inclusive. These are all enablers for sustainable development. For us, it's very clear that we need to have these and they're all interlinked. We see democracy promotion, good governance is linked to sustainable development.

But I'd also like to say that beyond development, democracy and good governance for us, it's also a question of conflict prevention and a lot of the work that we do there. We've seen the United Nations with the Okapi project in the Congo, try to work on this to stabilize certain regions and I would also argue that for us, media development especially independent professional media, is also good to counteract disinformation, which we see as a strategic threat both to our democracy but also to stability globally.

So, you can tell that we're not looking at this from a narrow point of view. We see this as very broad. Generally speaking, it's true that media development is a relatively small percentage of overall development assistance. Since in 2012 to 2018, Canada spent about \$17 million on this. Of course, it's connected with funding that we have as well. But it is something that we've looked at quite a bit. I think we're also very aware that in addition to being something we want to develop as a good in its own right, is that there are challenges. This extinction level threat that's facing the media, we're well aware of that and we know that this is something we need to work on.

Of course, in the current context, from our point of view, all our efforts connected to combatting COVID both domestically and internationally depends on reliable media. The WHO has talked about the infodemic, the spread of misinformation either deliberate disinformation or misinformation that people have. For us, the public health response both at home and abroad depends on this.

This is part of the reason why we're so keen on this. I would say also, just to build on what Mira was saying in terms of the 2030 agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, yes, it's connected specifically to the SDG 16 target 10, but it is connected to everything else in terms of how we do this. For us it's not a secondary development issue at all. It is actually something that's a pretty central pillar to what we're doing and of course in terms of democracy promotion. I work in government; I know what effects independent media has. When hard questions are asked from us, we have to answer. Our minister wants an answer to that, and they take that responsibility very seriously. We can tell the effect it has in terms of enhancing democracy.

Then maybe just the last point I'd like to make, I work on human rights policy and for us, obviously media freedom is part of freedom of expression. This is a fundamental human right under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on Civil Political Rights. But it's not just that, it's that a free independent media draws our attention to other violations that are occurring. We may have a whole network of diplomats and embassies and intelligence services, but let me tell you, 85 percent of the time that we hear about human rights violations or abuses occurring, it's because of independent journalism and civil society groups. And for us, that's an essential part of the infrastructure to good governance and human rights. So maybe just give me that as my initial response to why we think it's so important.

Mark Nelson:

That is an excellent overview of the many different aspects of why media matters and why donors should care about it. Thank you so much. It's almost something I'd like to capture and put on a video just in and of itself, because I think you made a really good overview of the argument. I'd like to ask Alex Jakana who is a Program Officer from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, who works on global media

partnerships and has participated in a lot of the private philanthropy conversations that are going on in this field. How do you guys see it? How does the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation see this sector and what are you doing in this crisis period?

Alex Jakana:

Thanks, Mark. Picking up from what Joy and Mira and Simon have so eloquently laid out, it's the media effect theory, which is decades old now. There's a robust body of study and literature that shows that media matters. When it comes to the Gates Foundation in particular, the Foundation exists primarily to address global health and development issues that by far disproportionately affect the world's poorest people. We're talking about 75 percent of the world's population living in low- to middle-income countries. I think COVID has illustrated very well how interconnected we all are and how it is unwise to try and silo segments of our lives. Health and development will directly impinge on your economics. It will impinge on your democracy. It will impinge on your politics, business security. All of these things are interwoven. And yet one thing that came to light very quickly as the Foundation was addressing these issues, was that these are under-reported issues, they are often ignored.

That's because newsrooms were facing the pressures that Joy, Mira, Simon and Marjorie have talked about. As business models are collapsing, business owners are not going to be inclined to dedicate very scarce resources to enteric and diarrheal diseases because let's face it, is Coca-Cola going to want to advertise next to that or to neglected tropical diseases or routine immunization when it comes to vaccines and trying to get pandemic preparedness in place, nope. This is where the foundation felt that stepping in and helping newsrooms that were already in a position to do more when it comes to raising knowledge and awareness around global health and development issues but had these barriers. They could be supported to help put in place the editorial teams that need to be in place to be able to generate the content. And under three guiding principles here are basically that editorial and creative independence is sacrosanct. And that has a ring fence straight from the beginning.

The choice of media partners to your point, Mark, about ownership structures would not work with state-owned media. We would look for independent media leaders in their sector and try and keep that going as well. And then transparency. For the media grant to be transparent about the relationship with the foundation and for the foundation, of course, it puts all the grants that we make out publicly to be addressed. This is where we've been making those investments in building those newsrooms. Within the context of COVID in particular, the many things that COVID has sort of thrown up is that evidence-based information is important in the best of times. But during this time, it has just become absolutely critical. Yet the access to data quite often requires a set of skills and sometimes headcounts that newsrooms may not have, and as well as hardware in places and in newsrooms that even in the best of times, media owners didn't see a business case for.

One of the things that the Foundation is looking to do is to focus on how we can support data journalism that actually helps not only get people the information they need to understand what's happening and make the right choices, but also to build their resilience against misinformation and to be able to reduce the effect of misinformation once it has made its way into their newsfeeds. The other thing is

about solutions. When people for weeks and months, it's now coming into a year, have been fed an information stream that their lives have been reduced to colour-coded maps and death tolls and death rates, it can be exhausting. It can push people into a state of despondency. It creates a fertile environment for polarization and all these other things we know. So highlighting where people are doing things that are working, whether it's Nigeria cities' disprogression plans, or Ghana's increase in emergency funding. These solutions-oriented storytelling, helping pull people and spare them the bitch of despondency. Then of course, gender equality, and Simon mentioned that. There's a great report that came out, you can find it on the International Women Media's Forum, about the under-representation of women's perspectives in COVID news. These are some of the things that the foundation is looking at Mark, over.

Mark Nelson: Thank you, Alex. That's great. And it's a good segue to our next speaker, who is James Deane, who has been working from his porch at BBC Media Action for many years on the problem that we're talking about today and is now helping to think through some of the solutions that we need to think about in terms of how to organize the donor community around this challenge that we're talking about. James, I'd like to turn to you to make this segue from the current crisis into longer-term solutions. We'll then have another round with all our speakers to talk about some of these longer-term challenges and bring in people from the audience. James I'll turn to you at this point.

James Deane: Thanks so much, Mark. Some had a policy at BBC Media Action, which is BBC's independent media support charity. But I've also worked with Mark, with Mira and with others engaging with the development assistance committee there, to try and improve both the polarization of media support by the international development community and the organization of that support. And that's been happening for a long time now, 10 to 15 years. We're trying to boost the amount of money the development community allocates to media support. I think we have to ask the question why has that been so difficult? I think the principal reason for that has been that it's not that people aren't convinced genuinely about the value of media to democracy, to development, even in the context of the sustainable development goals, it's much more to do with a nervousness among many donors about what they see as effectively market intervention, picking winners, getting involved in a highly political, highly complex area where they need a lot of skills to really work out what the heck they're doing, tracking what's working and what's not working.

Really there's very few systems within the development community, the official development community, and tiny numbers of people who exist to work out what an effective media support strategy looks like. I think what's happening now are two things for that community, which are really changing things. The first is that while there may be nervousness about market intervention, nervousness is rooted in a belief that there is a market. The fact is that there isn't a market any longer, particularly for low-income countries. The market is fundamentally broken and independent media, however smart or agile or digitally savvy they are, aren't creating a sustainable business out of the provision of trustworthy information, particularly in low-income countries. Particularly to large numbers of people, it has simply become impossible for all the reasons other people have mentioned.

That's been one issue, which I think has begun to hit home. The second of course is COVID. The fact that it's turbocharged the attention paid, this stuff affects millions and millions of people's lives. If you don't have the supply of acts of trustworthy information at a time where people are demanding access to trustworthy information in handling a huge, unprecedented crisis, then the whole of development is in big trouble. So, to forget it would put aside all the arguments around the value of the media sector in holding government to account and corruption in social cohesion and the Sustainable Development Goals and climate changes. This issue, I think has really brought it home. The donors are beginning to understand that this is different from what's happened in the past. And the other thing that's happening, which is different from what has happened in the past, is the media development community is realizing that something has fundamentally changed.

Organizations like BBC Media Action was set up on a set of assumptions, that if a regulatory environment and legal legislative environment could be got right, if capacity-building strategies could be put in place, the business mentoring strategies could be put in place, the kind of content partnerships, the understanding of audiences, all the things that we do to support independent media joining the BBC or joining on our own capacities. Ultimately, we would be working towards an editorially independent, financially sustainable, whatever the model was of media, but could survive into the future. I think it's very clear that it doesn't matter how well you do all those strategies. You're not going to be supporting, you're not going to be getting to that state of editorial independent, financially sustainable media ecosystem.

The problem then becomes one of money. Organizations cannot sustain themselves without funding. And we heard that from a fantastic presentation this morning from Judy Posetio, from a journalist on a pandemic project where they had a big survey with the number one thing that people are looking for is funding, institutional funding, which is to put them as institutions into the future. If the problem becomes one of money, then who decides who gets that money, and in deciding who gets that money, you're probably going to be deciding which media survive and which media fail. And that's really not something that organizations like BBC meteorites should be deciding. That's something that has a different role in terms of media support, at least in the longer term.

That really means that we've got three challenges. The first is how to scale up the amount of money available to a much larger extent than has been happening at present. The second is to ensure that that support is coherent and strategic. And third is to ensure that the support provided is legitimate and transparent, and the people receiving it are confident that there is a system behind it, that they can trust. These are all the reasons why we've been proposing, and this is increasingly led by Luminate to most of our consultants at the moment, two days a week for an international fund for public interest media. The international fund is designed to be a channel, a mechanism to allow donors, particularly bilateral donors, but also potentially tech companies and other donors who are not currently supporting media at scale, to massively scale up their support to this area.

So, one percent of development into systems, and the idea is it has to be really big. It's not worth doing, unless it's raising at least a hundred million dollars a year. And really it needs to be more like a billion dollars a year. I'm asked for the kind of figures

that we're trying to work towards. I can talk a lot more about the international fund. We might come back to it in a little bit later, but just very quickly, the principle around this is that the fund would be managed by a corporate board. It is donors that get to say where the money goes. The people that get to say where the money goes are the people who are from a journalistic community, also from a management community, people who are most expert in managing a fund like this and apportioning at where it needs to ensure real legitimacy and effectiveness.

We've produced a 140,000-word feasibility study. For this, I'll put it in the link, but it's Luminaidgroup.com/fpen international fund of public interest media. We lay out the rationale for this structure — the governance, the evaluation, the resourcing strategy, and just about everything else you can think of. We've worked with PWC to do a kind of analysis of other global funds and how to organize it that way. I can talk a lot more about that, but I'll just flag that at the moment. Maybe we'll come back to it in a conversation.

Mark Nelson:

That's great. That's a really good thing to have on the table and the reasoning behind it. I think it's a critically important initiative. One of the interesting things that we have been hearing from a lot of the NED support, the Nation Endowment for Democracy, well for CMA gives about 25 percent of its overall funding to independent media and does so in a way that is often just direct support for business operations. It's done in a pretty open way, and it sometimes goes over long periods of time. And our funding was really critical to the creation of some really well-known independent media organizations that are in the developing world such as Rappler in the Philippines, and Malaysiakini in Malaysia. They were all funded initially by NED funding. What we're hearing from a lot of those organizations is that they are pessimistic about the business model. They do believe that that hybrid model of funding is actually a pretty healthy way to organize a media system so that you get funding from different sources, not only from one funder, but from a variety of funders and also from a variety of activities, selling subscriptions, doing things to make yourself more responsive to the market and listening to your audience.

We are hearing that this might be more of a transition period that we're thinking about. It may be possible that if we do this right and fund the media effectively for some years and with enough rigour and at a higher level of support, we may be able to turn this crisis into something that would actually be more sustainable in the long run. I think that the global fund could play a role like that. I want to turn to back to Marjorie, because I know that a lot of Internews is grantees, this type of hybrid approach as being critical to the way they're dealing with this crisis and to their future. How do you see that and what do we need to do to take this moment of crisis and turn it into something that's more sustainable?

Marjorie Rouse:

I think as I discussed at the opening, a crisis is also a horrible thing to waste, and it is pushing organizations to test models that they were hesitant about in the past to look at different advertising streams. And we're very much in agreement with you that a healthy media organization is going to have a diverse set of revenue streams and not be 100 percent donor dependent in any single way. And this applies to media everywhere. This applies as much to media here where I'm sitting as it does to any place we work. When the crisis happened, we did three things. We upped our

investment in business models with news gain with Joy sitting here because she joined Internews in the crisis.

We saw a crisis in the Kenyan market and had been in conversations with Joy for a long time. And she is absolutely brilliant on these things. Her new job is to focus on Africa and all of our partners, starting with Kenya. We invested in a mentor bench that spans everything from different business models to health journalism, and I can talk a bit about their work. Then the third thing we did in March is we saw that a lot of these local, especially small organizations that were meeting highly niche markets, like super local community media were on the verge of extinction. We partnered with Luminate who James has referred to, and between money we were able to put to the table and Luminate came up with a \$600,000 rapid response fund that rolled out in March. March feels like a million years ago to me. I'm not sure if everybody else feels the same way.

But we rolled it out. And we tried to get as many local organizations as possible. We got over a thousand applications and ended up with the \$600,000. We got a thousand applications in a hundred countries. We moved all \$600,000 with 189 grants. And this was also pretty lightweight. These grants are all \$3,000 to \$4,000 as the average size, but lightweight in terms of what we were asking them to do, because we knew it was a crisis we needed to respond to quickly. It was also a great opportunity to gather information about what local media is struggling with and the vast majority of them needed the assistance for content. They just they didn't have resources to produce the needed COVID content. Then the next tightest request was survival followed by equipment.

In some cases, these little investments kept the payroll going. They bought some needed equipment or it allowed them to focus in. Our partners spend everything from small radio stations in Ukraine. We worked with a Brazilian partner. they're a non-profit media and one of the largest slums that literally needed to get information out to slum residents. We also supported a Filipino migrant community media in Great Britain because the Filipino population in Great Britain had very high coronavirus incidents and we needed to get information out in their language that they could understand. That gives you a snapshot of what we supported, but it was revealing into what the needs are and how even small investments in a crisis like that can be a bridge.

There is however that bigger problem of sustainability, viability. I think we as funders need to work very closely with our partners. We need to push them now in this crisis to think differently about their models, to look at diversification and to find ways to meet their audience needs. The mentor bench we're doing is another way to help them with being better at meeting the health journalism needs that combats disinformation as well, because if they're not prepared to cover health, most local media outlets we partner with don't have the health reporters. They might not have that expertise. And yet they're working in their community and local languages. Shortly, our mentor bench will be putting out things like guidance on plasma therapy for journalists, a vaccine information sheet. We were looking at disinformation around vaccines before COVID hit. And now we're looking at a global vaccine effort in the age of disinformation. It's something that the media and the medical community, the health community, need to tackle together because the

disinformation and misinformation around vaccines everywhere from Nigeria to Ukraine to Indonesia to Pakistan that were huge issues where the health community is just going to escalate. I'll stop there.

Mark Nelson:

That's really good. Mira, do you want to jump in on this conversation at this point? One of the issues that comes to mind as we're discussing this is we're talking very much about the media and its business models and the way that it exists in society. We haven't been talking very much about the broader enabling conditions for media and the media environment, and how do we come together to support the policy reform process that needs to take place in many parts of the world. We just saw transitions happen in recent years in Tunisia and Ethiopia and now one in Sudan. There are countries that are coming with political reforms, and they come to the international community. I'm very familiar with the Ethiopia story because we had a NED grantee, a NED contact who went to the president's office.

He went looking for funding to help create a policy reform process for the media sector during the transition in Ethiopia. But they only got one donor that was willing to pay for one consultant to sit in the president's office. They didn't get the support they needed during that really short period of transition when they could have done so much. How do we make the case that this is a broad system of governance that we need to work on that requires serious policy reforms. The same way we would deal with transforming the health sector or the education sector, we need to work on the media sector. What do you think about that, Mira?

Mira Milosevic:

Thank you for the question. I think that James started talking about it when he said that 20 years ago, 30 years ago, we had all these assumptions that we made around media systems. We also had this set of media laws, standards and practices that have shaped and defined how journalism organizations and the media sector operates. On one hand, we have the fact that the business environment, technological environment and social environment has changed so much that we don't have a secure space for journalism and news media to survive. On the other hand, we have this rapid growth of digital platforms, digital information spaces, that unlike heavily regulated regular media spaces are at this point, more like a "Wild West" in terms of how they're shaped and regulated. So, misinformation and disinformation of course thrive in this digital space, and there's so many factors that are impacted.

I was speaking in a panel Tuesday. I said, "YouTube on its own earns from advertising US\$15 billion dollars per year. This is more than all newspapers, digital news media and magazines in the world earn per year." And the trend for YouTube and other platforms is growing, while the trend for journalism organizations is going down. Within this digital space, we need to figure out, everywhere in the world, where is the space for public interest information? Where is this space for journalism? How are we going to do that? Because with the private and corporate governance so far, that hasn't been the case. That is one huge area of policy where I think we need to have more power and more voices from the journalism and media community at the moment. When we have debates, for instance, in Europe, around the Digital Services Act, which is the major regulation of digital markets at the moment, we have very few organizations that have capacity to investigate these issues at depth.

To understand the mechanisms behind digital advertising, for instance, and how does that impact the small digital news businesses and how are they disadvantaged? Mark mentioned that advertisers were reluctant to advertise next to COVID content. There is a huge need to advocate and develop policy in the area that needs to prove to advertisers that there is absolutely no proof that advertising with credible news content has a negative impact on brands. At the moment, it's the other way around. They are addressing misinformation and disinformation by blacklisting legitimate journalism and news content. That's another huge policy area where we have very low capacity to advocate as a sector. There are many more, like I mentioned, tax relief, designating journalism as a charitable status cause so that private donors and individual donors can invest more into journalism. We have developed this GFMD and together with the hundred niche organizations around the world and appeal for supporting journalism at the time of COVID. We have six groups of stakeholders that we call to do everything they can to support journalism

Mark Nelson: That's really helpful. I want to jump over to Joy to have you react to what Mira just said. I mean, from the ground level in Kenya and from your work in Africa, how do you see this broader environment intervention, that engagement that needs to take place? Can outsiders help on that front? Can foreign donors support policy reforms and policy changes? Were they helpful in Kenya at any point?

Joy Chelagat: When you look at what's happened in Kenya over the last number of years, we've consistently changed different types of business models. We've said we've rebranded, there's been so many different changes that businesses have made to try and increase their revenue and what we're realizing is that some of those changes aren't actually having an impact.

What we're realizing is that if you get to the space where we're helping organizations diversify, let's give an example of one of the things that we've done with the DRC that's currently happening in DRC. We have found great journalists who have started their own independent organizations and right now, through donor funding, we're actually helping them to develop business models to understand how to run it as a business.

I think when there's direct support, as we're saying toward helping organizations, first of all, improve their structures because I think it's also improving some of the structures and the processes.

Also, it will be quite important, to have a broader conversation around policy, particularly when you're looking at digital in Kenya.

Kenya is trendsetter, particularly in digital, but what you find very interestingly, as we've talked about, the duopoly also affects Kenya. I remember one time when I was working, this was during the elections 2017, allow me to just give an on-the-ground example.

During 2017, we were running the elections. We were uploading up to about 50 videos a day at KTN. KTN is under Standard Group in Kenya. You're having concurrent viewers when you're streaming up to 20,000 and for all that effort and you have eight people working. What you're getting is a million Kenya shillings equivalent of US\$10,000 and that was the best that we had gotten. And that was

during elections when you have global viewership, usually every month, we're talking about 3,000.

Now, if I can bring it back to what it costs to run that team, you're talking about an investment in a number of laptops. You're talking about an editorial team, you're talking about two different shifts, and I know I'm getting into the weeds by looking at that, but it kind of helps you see what we're talking about. Why there is a need and if we are to come with a solution that helps us to number one, look at how are these global tech companies ensuring that they're giving funding to help independent media, but the real question is wouldn't it make more sense to have a revenue share from the beginning?

If I can just give another very simple example, Facebook, a couple of years ago in Kenya, loaded quick, fast-loading pages and many media houses jumped through it because we were like, "Yes, mobile data in Kenya, that's where people connect so anything that allows our users to connect content faster, we'll do it."

When we implemented it, we realized a 15–20 percent drop in our ad revenue because then we weren't getting ads directly through that. First of all, we have to push to get a staff of three or four people to run your Facebook page, and then when your content is posted on Facebook, you don't even get the 20 percent or the 15 percent you could have gotten from the ads for that.

I think another important conversation, just to find one to add about the advertising space. We need to have a big conversation about global advertisers and their advertising policy. What's happening right now in Kenya is major advertisers such as Coca Cola, we're talking about telco companies. Those are large advertisers in Kenya.

When they're advertising right now, they're advertising through Google. Yet they have agencies in Kenya and their agencies can actually work directly to pull a larger percentage of the funding directly to the media houses in terms of digital advertising. I think some of the conversations need to be around that to enable spaces where you do have operations in the country. It really makes no sense to have to go through Google and Facebook. Whereas there are actually ways that you could get that support directly.

I think that's why Newsgain, just to touch on them as Marjorie was talking about, why they brought in the Newsgain into the media business team is to look at some of the smaller things that even as we're talking about expanding the model when we're talking about a hybrid model turning those little taps so that we can increase the amount of money that comes into media. Thank you.

Mark Nelson:

That's great. I'm going to ask Simon to jump in at this point because Canada and the United Kingdom have joined forces to try to give a jumpstart on a global scale to this issue of media freedom and international policy.

Foreign governments have two big policy areas that they can use to support the media sector. One is from foreign and security policy, where foreign ministries put sanctions on countries that killed journalists and they have ostracized them when they don't behave.

And then they have the development policy, which we've been talking about today. You are hosting the next piece of a conversation that started in London last year on this approach. I just wonder if you could say a few words about what you're doing on that front, sort of as a global push for media freedom.

**Simon
Collard-Wexler:**

Sure, I'd be happy to. I think you're absolutely right when we talk about the different ways foreign ministries look at this because on the one hand, we see two big strands of action.

One is support for media development. I think this is the stuff we're talking about today, which is critical. The second is defending media freedom and these are really two sides of the same coin. Without media freedom, existing outlets no matter how professional they are or how sustainable they are, they'll be silenced. Those voices won't be heard and they won't be able to perform the critical tasks they serve.

But without financial sustainability, the quality and quantity of journalism is going to decline. Certain media institutions will be a lot more vulnerable to pressures from governments and other regulators on these issues and effectively the free press won't be able to play its role.

I really see these as both sides of the same point on that. Just on the point of media sustainability, this is something we're going to look at during this conference. To be very clear, there is a conference, a second global conference for media freedom.

We're co-hosting with Botswana and it's going to take place on the 16th of November. It's a public event, so everyone is invited to participate. There'll be a news release on that next week for your information.

It's focused on a healthy global information ecosystem during COVID-19, but it will cover issues like media sustainability. We've had a good discussion with Mira on this because when we talk about promoting media sustainability in the past, we've talked a lot about professionalization efforts for journalists or providing certain equipment and things like this.

But I think what this discussion today has really highlighted is that is only the surface of it. We have deeper questions about the sustainability, the business model, the regulatory environment, like Mira mentions that would be impeding adaptation in the media landscape so that is part of the discussion on the media sustainability.

But the other part of it really is about how can we protect media freedom, because we're talking about attacks on journalists of course. We're talking about harassment threats, the use of surveillance, artificial intelligence in the digital realm, which is creating a whole bunch of new challenges for us.

I think you know a lot of statistics, nearly a thousand journalists and media workers killed in the past decade. We're talking about nine out of 10 cases of murders of journalists that have not been resolved in any way.

These are clearly issues that we have to address a lot more frontally. One thing that we did at the London conference is the United Kingdom and Canada established the Media Freedom Coalition. This is now a coalition of 37 countries from all over the world that are working together to advocate for media freedom.

We've had some declarations, we weighed in on a number of cases like Maria Ressa in the Philippines. We have also talked about what's going on in Belarus, and other cases where maybe they're not getting as much attention, for example, a number of journalists in Yemen have been in prison and sentenced to death. We need to raise our voices on this. We need to be applying quick concerted diplomatic pressure on this situation.

Another thing that we've been doing is we have established Magnitsky-type sanctions. We've actually used those, for example, for those responsible, for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. We've also used them recently in Belarus, where we've seen attacks on media freedom.

This is just one of the many tools we have and the other thing we've developed is the Global Media Defence Fund. It's a bit different from the other efforts we're talking about funding sustainability of media.

Here it's about helping defend journalists from attacks in the courtrooms. Legal assistance that we can provide. Our hope is that by helping sustain media development and defend media freedom, these two things will create a better environment for media freedom. Thanks.

Mark Nelson:

That's great, thank you very much. I'm just going to go back to James for one closing comment before we start opening up for some questions. How optimistic are you that we're going to be able to pull all this together eventually and do something really meaningful?

I do think that we need to push for the one percent of ODA. I do think we need a really sustained effort on this. Have a look at any global campaign, any kind of effort that a company or a political party or an election, and you see the spending on media is an enormous part of what they do.

Why is it so small in the international development field? Why are we still struggling to make this case? And how optimistic are you that we might be able to change this?

James Deane:

I think the effects of a market failure are going to become more and more apparent, not just with COVID, but a whole bunch of things. Someone's put a very good question in the chat about holding response to the pandemic to account, but issues of corruption. I think we can expect corruption to soar in the next few months and years because we've got a weakened media system and the evidence, all the evidence suggests that the media is the most effective check on corruption.

We can expect lots of other effects as our information communication systems become more and more dysfunctional. I think those issues are just going to hit home so fiercely, but I don't think development donors and others can actually avoid them for very much longer. The other thing that is going to hit home is we've got to get out of this.

What you were just talking about is actually there are solutions to this, but you need to have institutions and systems that are capable of putting together the ingredients and the actors who need to come up with it.

Whether that's development banks and private sector, public sector, media organizations, and that's another thing the international fund is designed to do.

It is a fund just like the global fund that is working on malaria. But by having if you like, knowledge capital with the expertise, but also political status as a legitimacy, as well as financial capital. I think it can work with countries and systems to actually put together some of these ingredients. One of the things we do in a feasibility study is to talk about these things about what an exit strategy looks like.

This is not going to be a kind of short-term area. Just so people know, Luminate and MacArthur Foundation and others are setting up committed, sufficient funding to set up an interim secretariat for the international fund for public interest media. We're currently hiring. We've asked Russell Reynolds to do the executive search for the founding executive director of this and we hope to make an announcement about before too long.

I can't say exactly when, but we're fairly advanced on that process of finding an executive director and we're quite excited about that whole process.

We're in the middle of a pandemic, resources are extraordinarily stretched. This is not a great time to be raising money for a major new fund. At the same time, the need for such a fund is quite essential.

We're very optimistic about the prospects of assets. I think there's a question of how long it takes. What we need clearly is political leadership. What we're increasingly seeing is organizations on the ground saying, "Ah, the problem here is there isn't enough funding," and this is why Luminate and others are supporting this.

They exist to do the seed funding to get new models off the ground to really catalyze innovation, by sustaining media over the long term to get us out of this crisis, and that needs more money and more long-term structured support.

I'm very optimistic about this. I think, by the way, there's another an issue here, which is partly about solving the media crisis and also addressing the infodemic, and I think they're not quite the same thing. We may want to get back to that if we've got time.

Mark Nelson: Thank you, James. That is a really good point. I'm going to turn to Heather Gilbert, my colleague at SEMA to bring some questions that have been in the chats and other places to the table, and we will open it up for others to ask from the floor.

So Heather, what do we have in terms of questions?

Heather Gilbert: Thanks Mark. We have a couple of questions in the chat and since we are just doing a Zoom call, I can ask the people who put the questions in to directly ask their question to the panellists. This question from Wayne Sharp is on investigative journalism.

Wayne Sharp: My question is about investigative journalism because we know even not only in the developing world, but also in countries in transition, it's been media donors who have funded the bulk of investigative journalism.

Now, even in North America, you see groups like ProPublica, *Texas Tribune*, getting donor funds and that's perhaps letting some of the major publishers off the hook for funding investigative journalism. It's expensive, takes a lot of time. The bottom line for a lot of publishers is that it just doesn't make economic sense for them.

My question is: is this a sustainable model going forward for the media donor to be the people underwriting this work? And it's a critical time to have this work being done with the COVID-19 crisis where it is. We'll have to look at somewhere down the road, we'll have to look at how this went the way it went and in many parts of the world it went very badly.

It's an open question for the panel's thoughts on that issue.

Mark Nelson: I see that Josh Laporte has a related question.

Josh Laporte: I think it kind of is in terms of looking forward. What we've seen with our partners, our media partners around the world, mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South America was when the pandemic hit, those of our media partners that had actually gone through pandemic coverage or outbreaks before, for example, with Ebola in West Africa and then some Dengue outbreaks that really hit some of our partners hard, even the newsrooms, one of our partners in Paraguay, they were much better prepared for what had happened with COVID and all sorts of issues, ranging from safety of their own employees to resource allocations, more efficiently and even fundraising.

What we were able to do was capture their best practices from that and share them with our network and I'm wondering if donors have a role to play in finding these best practices that actually came out of COVID in time for the next one or any kind of crisis that's hitting, because I'm also seeing that our partners have actually been able to... I don't want to use the word "capitalized" but they've been able to really reach audiences in much better ways, with much more trusted info, even by text messages, getting emergency and breaking news out and really building up their audiences and trust. I don't know where that leads in terms of long-term resiliency and viability, but I feel like there's some lessons out there and I'm wondering what we can all do and what kind of resources that might be there for that. Thank you.

Mark Nelson: I might turn to Marjorie to jump in on that on those two last questions about investigative journalism and learning from the innovations that are taking place right now and anybody else who wants to talk about.

Marjorie Rouse: Good to hear both Josh and Wayne. Full disclosure, Wayne actually ran an investigative journalism project in Ukraine funded by Global Affairs Canada. When it comes to real investigative reporting, if it's going to be donor funded, it really has to be hands-off in terms of editorial and not every funder is equipped to operate that way and building is looking at capacity and newsroom viability, not necessarily the specifics of what they're doing.

There are many investigative reporting organizations that will not take donor money or will not take government money. They might take private money, but these organizations are in desperate need of support. I think when it comes specifically to investigative reporting, it needs to be established in a way that protects the reputation, the independence and the role of investigative reporting.

Josh, we found the same thing. We've been doing health work now for almost 20 years and have done a lot of learning from our Ebola teams and our Ebola response specifically around rumor tracking, as well as our HIV work that we're bringing here.

Even if they were local journalists in remote places, they had methodologies and approaches that actually made them much more resilient in dealing with this situation than those that had never reported on a health crisis. There's tons of panels and conferences, but every place where we can look at how we share those lessons learned, how we share that information, how we help journalists, who are now, like every journalist in the world, covering a health issue in a way that has never happened before and every journalist in the world is finding ways to deal with disinformation around that health issue as they cover it and coming head to head with that at the same time.

The more we as a community come together, share our lessons and learn from each other to support our partners in the media out there is super important.

Mark Nelson: I'm going to jump to James. We'll have to keep things short now because we have a hard stop at three o'clock. James, can you address the independent investigative journalism question?

James Deane: Well, just very quickly on that and just one other thing. On investigative journalism, I think this issue on what terms money is provided to whom and who governs and who makes those decisions is going to become massive quite quickly.

I think it's fantastic what Internews has done. I really welcome what Google has done in terms of short funding that they're providing at the moment, Facebook and others.

But these are not ways that funding should be decided. There needs to be, if it's about really deciding who's going to win and who is going to lose in the future, there needs to be a different way of doing this long term.

I think it's about a decolonization issue. That's a big issue for BBC Media Action about actually, who is deciding these issues about who is shaping the public sphere within these countries, and this is very much how we international funders have also been designed for.

Can I very quickly just say, on the second question, is that because of donor conversation, donors tend to support news and media. Different donors tend to support health communication and actually these things do need to come together in a way that's not happened before.

We're an unusual organization. We have very large health communication programs. We're providing through our programs of COVID alone, including supported by Global Affairs, reaching about 60 million people in 54 languages, but also doing lots of this stuff on supporting news media as well.

A lot of stuff around misinformation and really getting people to take to action on COVID, you need things like drama and comedy and other ways of getting information out, not just through news. And I do think these debates need to come together more than they have happened in the past, but that's perhaps a bigger issue we can't get into much detail.

Mark Nelson: Very good point and really an interesting, I wonder if Alex Jakana can chime in.

Alex Jakana: Thank you very much, you read my mind there. Excellent questions. I'll try and be very brief.

When it comes to investigative reporting and then also to the second question about how the support that can happen. There in the information ecosystem, there would be core initiatives where the funding could probably go directly to the media house and an investigative team and that's the actual reporting.

And then there'd be what we'd call supporting initiatives. This is how the journalism is done. The investigative reporting team needs access to reliable data.

They need to be able to process that data. They need to be able to investigate the data and then make sense of it. For some funders, there would be a lot to navigate to be able to get to funding the investigative journalism in a way that both the practitioner, that's the journalist, and the audience are comfortable that this is free and fair and independent.

The supporting initiatives space where, for example, I'll give you an example more specific and this is not investigative reporting, but it could be stretched.

Within the COVID context, one of the funding initiatives that we're doing at the Gates Foundation is looking at data journalism and funding a data hub that will get source as close to real-time as possible for someone like say the Africa CDC, or the World Health Organization.

They produce pre-produced data visualizations, data sets that have been broken down and they take the heavy lifting out of accessing reliable data, making it readily available and then making it available as a public good to media practitioners open.

That way you reduce this likelihood of picking one media house that you support and therefore picking winners, which James mentioned but you also make it easier for the practitioner of investigative journalism to do that by reducing the cost of finding readily accessible data that they can investigate that is already pre-prepared, cleaned, it has been harvested, processed and made available for them to be able to stretch and play with.

Then the other thing would also be in that space of supporting initiatives is sometimes media entities need to know what is working so that you can stop spending money on what is not working. Media evaluation lessons learned and tracking can be fairly expansive and this is where again, funders can come in to create public goods.

For example, we supported the Center for Investigative Reporting and gave them a grant and they built this offline impact tracker, which was designed by Lindsey Green-Barber, who some of you might know, and this tool is available to all reporters and media houses. It really helps investigative reporters to be able to track their work over years, be able to fill it out in different sections from reporters to beats too, and see what's working, what's not working, how is it working?

And that way media houses are able to manage and direct their resources in a more cost-effective manner. Some of these supporting initiatives that are public goods could be another way of fuelling investigative reporting and addressing some of the other concerns and mitigating against some of the other risks.

Mark Nelson: That makes a lot of sense. Thank you for bringing that up.

We have a question for Simon, from Mel Bunce asking if you think it will be possible as the GDP drops and as the issues around COVID continue to take centre stage for governments to really make the case for official aid to media development? Or do you think it's getting more unpromising going forward if you could just answer really quickly so that we can end on time, but I think it's a good question.

Simon Collard-Wexler: Certainly a very good question. I don't want to speculate too much about where things are going to go, but I think it's likely there's going to be some adjustment once the immediate crisis subsides, and budgets need to get back on track. I think that's going to happen across the board. Now how it will affect different sectors that remains to be seen.

I'll just say two things here. One, the COVID pandemic has really highlighted the importance of media more than anything else. We've also gone through a number of years where we've seen the effects of disinformation in our political systems. I think we're very acutely aware in Canada about how important this is, not to mention the domestic challenges we face in our own media space.

We understand that this is important. The question is how much can we allocate overseas? And here we'll have to be innovative. We'll have to look at examples, like pooled funding. I think some of the examples that have been brought up are very interesting. They'll help us be more efficient, get to the recipients more quickly, perhaps be more effective. I think these are the kinds of things that we have to look at to make sure we get the right facts.

Mark Nelson: Fantastic. Well, listen, I want to thank everyone for spending this time with us. I think it's been a really terrific conversation. We've had great interventions and I hope we can all learn from what's been said here and take it to the next level.

Please engage with us and work with us at SEMA and all the different organizations that are represented here. We're all very open and ready to work with you and we hope we can continue this conversation here and as we go forward at the event in November.

I am really glad that we've opened this link with Canada, it's just a really terrific partnership that I hope we can deepen and make more meaningful as time goes on.

Thank you all for coming.



JOURNALISM IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

THE ONGOING CONTEST BETWEEN JOURNALISM AND MISINFORMATION

PANEL

Moderator: Sarah Everts, Carleton University

Speakers: Guy Berger, UNESCO; Tara Kirk Sell, John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health;
Jessica McDonald, FactCheck.org; Charles Seife, New York University;
Felix Simon, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism

Sarah Everts: Hello everyone, and welcome to the panel on the Ongoing Contest between Journalism and Misinformation. My name is Sarah Everts, I'm the CTV Chair in Digital Science Journalism at Carleton University, and I am delighted by our panel of speakers. They come from a diversity of places, journalists, researchers and policy folks from everywhere, from the front lines of fact checking, to the bird's eye view of the infodemic.

I'll start with my circle, Charles Seife, who is a writer, journalist and professor at New York University. We have Jessica McDonald, science writer for FactCheck.org, Tara Kirk Sell, a senior scholar at the John Hopkins Center for Health Security, Felix Simon, doctoral scholar at the Oxford Internet Institute. And finally, Guy Berger, Director for Freedom of Expression and Media Development at UNESCO.

Off the top, we're going to do a round robin. I want to remind any participants that if you have a question, please put it in the Q&A. We will eventually get to panel questions and a panel discussion, but off the top, I'd like to give everybody on the panel five to 10 minutes to talk about their activities, their experiences, observation, their research with respect to COVID-19, whether it's from an academic perspective or the perspective of the front lines.

Let's start with Jessica McDonald. Take it away. What is your experiences of the pandemic?

Jessica McDonald: Just to give everyone some background, I trained as a scientist in immunology specifically, and then decided to leave the bench and go to journalism. I've been doing that for the past little while, and I've been at FactCheck.org for a little over two years. FactCheck.org is a non-partisan fact-checking outlet that's run out of the University of Pennsylvania, and we're one of the three big fact-checking websites in the United States. There are a couple others, but we're generally considered one of the main ones.

I'm a science writer and the only person on the team who is specifically dedicated to science. So, when this pandemic hit, it upended my world, to say the least, and it's been quite the whirlwind. Initially early on, we were just trying to get factual information out, and it was a lot of working with two of my other colleagues who are part of the Facebook initiative, and they are responsible for debunking false or misleading information on Facebook, on Instagram, things they see on Twitter and social media.

Initially, I wasn't super involved with what they were doing, and I would only be brought in if something was very scientific and they wanted me to cover something, so that I would have my expertise and reporting skills for those things. My primary job has been to focus on misinformation or the incorrect claims from politicians, so that is my focus.

Very quickly, with the Trump administration, I had a lot of work to do. It became a daily occurrence with the coronavirus Task Force briefings, which would often run an hour long, or sometimes even an hour-and-a-half when Trump was speaking. A lot of what I've been doing is reviewing a lot of video and transcripts, listening to what the president has said, what members of the administration have said, and when something is incorrect or they're not quite fully correct, then we try to get correct information out to the public. I write articles that provide that to our readers.

Going back, initially, I do two different types of pieces that we try to help the public with. One was a category of informational Q&A-style articles. If people just want a good place to get factual information, they can see those. I've done several on just the pandemic in general. I've done some on vaccines, antibody testing. We have a series of those, along with the specific claims that come up. Then we have all of our other Facebook misinformation posts as well, that debunk specific claims.

I'm happy to answer any additional questions people have about that process. I would say we're learning all the time, and one of the big observations is that as someone dealing with political claims, there are different claims happening at different levels. It's been a very interesting rollercoaster at times, to have the president say one thing, and then have public health officials say another. And then for the president to sort of backtrack or change a little bit. It's created a lot of confusion, among the public about what is the correct information? What should I be believing?

We try to provide a resource for people for that, but it is extremely difficult and this is a scary time. People just want to know what to do, and we're not seeing consistent public health messaging from the Trump administration. We do view our role as at least trying to get that information out there.

Sarah Everts: Thank you. Let's go to you Felix.

Felix Simon: Hi there. I'm working at the moment at the University of Oxford, and mostly with the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, where we've done some research on COVID and sort of the communicative issues around COVID. I won't give a long presentation and just will try to briefly talk about three points.

One of the things we observed is that COVID misinformation is quite diverse, both in terms of the claims and the format. There's also mounting evidence, which is the second point, that a lot of it, as Jessica has just said, comes from the top. From politicians like Donald Trump, but also celebrities. But having said that, the true effects of COVID misinformation are quite hard to measure and they're probably overstated.

Finally, and I'm going against the grain here of the popular narrative, personally, I think that the infodemic, it's quite an easy to grasp the concept, but also highly problematic. I'm personally not sure if we should use this term, the concept, not least because it can be abused by politicians to gag human rights such as freedom of the press or freedom of speech.

Let me just briefly begin with the misinformation itself. As I just said, COVID misinformation, that's something we've found is really diverse and it cannot really be put into a single box. In one study led by my colleague, Scott Brennen, we basically found that a lot of COVID misinformation seems to be cases where some truth has been distorted, rather than flat out made up. It's not all outright falsehoods, but truth mixed with untruths. And that's quite common for misinformation and something we've seen in the past.

Surprisingly, we didn't find any examples of this sort of deepfakes, nor has anyone else to my knowledge, at least relating to COVID. This could be due to the limitations of our study, which had a pretty small sample size, but we did actually come across

some cheap fakes that have been done. And they seem to be slightly more common when it comes to COVID misinformation, but even these were pretty rare, sort of in our corpus.

The type of claims, that was quite interesting, they were really varied. So many statements were about governments or authorities like the WHO and the United Nations, and about a quarter referred to the spread of the virus and medical tips and how you can treat yourself against it. In recent months, according to *First Draft*, they built on our initial study from April, it seems to have shifted more to misinformation claims about community spread, certain groups of people spreading the virus, and also lots of claims about controlling the pandemic and the activities of public authorities.

And so, briefly talking about the format, because this was all on Claimspace. Another study, again led by Scott Brennen, we also looked at the visuals in COVID misinformation, and found, perhaps unsurprisingly, that they play a very important role in misinformation. For one, because they illustrate and selectively emphasize arguments in claims. They also purport to present evidence for the claims. So, they ram the message home, and they can also act to impersonate, supposedly authoritative sources for claims. There were lots of fake documents supposedly coming, say from the Philippine Health Ministry, or again, the WHO.

Briefly, to talk about where the misinformation comes from, the effects, we increasingly see evidence that misinformation is emerging, not just bottom up, but also coming from the top. This includes politicians like Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro pushing certain claims, but also celebrities or even concerted efforts by certain state actors.

Even when considering all of this, the sort of true effect of misinformation, it's actually quite hard to measure, and we have to be really careful around such claims as "misinformation kills." While people claim, for instance, we've seen misinformation circulate and mentioned servers that they are concerned about it, politicians or friends are sharing it, neither this nor the existence of COVID misinformation, necessarily imply large-scale effects. One might call this the existence equals impact fallacy.

And the reasons for that, if we look to cognitive sciences, most people are not as gullible or persuadable as we think, and they have quite diverse information diets and rely on more than just one source, especially when it comes to making decisions that are important to their own life. Say something like self-medication, which is quite important here in life, they will usually rely on different sources, not just of on one claim, which probably comes from a piece of misinformation, that tells them, for instance, to drink bleach. The effects of this seem to be pretty small.

We've also seen evidence, and my colleague at the Reuters Institute, Richard Fletcher talked about this at this conference yesterday, that for instance, people in the United Kingdom largely turned to trusted sources and known experts in the current crisis. And that trust in these institutions actually hasn't significantly decreased.

While it's likely that COVID misinformation has some effects, the extent of these effects, I would say is often less clear, or likely overstated in the public narrative around misinformation.

And finally, to round it off, let me just say a couple of things about the supposed infodemic we are living in. Again, it's an easy to grasp concept because it brings the language from epidemiology over into the realm of information communication. But I would argue that it's also highly problematic that we probably shouldn't use it and all the related terms.

This is also an argument my Oxford colleague and I make in forthcoming work. The reason is that information does not in fact, spread like a virus, nor is information as infectious as viruses are. So, the infodemic metaphor ignores basic findings from both communication and cognitive sciences.

When it comes to the second claim that's embedded in this infodemic term, the extreme information abundance that's claimed by the WHO, that was the case in the early days of the pandemic, but we seem to be, maybe not in the United States, but at least in Europe, we seem to be past that stage.

In fact, information abundance is common in modern high choice media environments, and while people might perceive information overload, we've also evolved skills in responding to too much news. One of them, for instance, again, is flocking to reliable news sources, for which there's good evidence during the current pandemic.

The biggest problem around the use of the term is two-fold, but only is the infodemic metaphor from my perspective, ill-fitting in that it lacks explanatory power, and is in some regards just plainly wrong. It's also sort of invites policy makers to opt for overboard solutionism, which in a worst-case scenario, actually leads to further encroachment on human rights such as freedom of speech and freedom of the press.

The last issue is it's not just hypothetical. For instance, just yesterday, the International Press Institute published a roundup, about 17 states have actually passed various forms of laws during the pandemic, which threaten these human rights laws on censorship and laws around fake news. And this is a finding backed by one of Oxford's legal scholars, Roxana Radu, which has looked at the same things and has found that under the guise of the infodemic, and the supposed massive threat of misinformation, especially authoritarian governments, have exploited this and used this to basically gag the opposition, gag the press, and try to suppress any form of opposition coming through the press. That's basically my two cents on this topic.

Sarah Everts: Thanks Felix. Tara?

Tara Kirk Sell: Thanks for having me. I'm excited to be at this conference and give a talk here. I work on policy and practice related to pandemics and other catastrophic health events and have been working in this field for over 10 years now. It's really sort of strange to me that my field, which is very niche, is now the topic of conversation for many people.

My centre, the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, has really been on the frontlines of providing factual information and policy recommendations for COVID-19. My academic research interests are quite broad under that health

security umbrella, but they do include work on news media and public health communication. It also includes dealing with misinformation in the context of fear-inducing outbreaks like Ebola, or now, in the case of COVID-19.

I'm going to briefly talk about some of my research that we did looking at Ebola, and it's very interesting how that reflects what Felix was talking about, that in some ways, you can just take what is very similar, the way that these processes are reflected for different threats.

In our research, we took a look at a sample of Twitter, and we saw that about 5 percent of the tweets that we looked at were false, flat out false. But another 5 percent were this mix of true and false information, or they were taking something that was true, and they were twisting it in a way that left an impression that was false.

It was actually incredibly difficult because we were using human coders and it was very difficult, even though they were public-health trained and knew that outbreak forward and backwards, for us to actually parse what was happening there, because it is so tricky.

We also noticed that about 28 percent of the tweets that we looked at seemed designed to generate some sort of discord or response from the reader. So, we wondered, what's happening there? Are we trying to actually generate more of a problem here than just providing false information?

Then these tweets, the ones that contain misinformation are often, when you compare them to the ones that don't, more often had a political aspect, and created that discord over risk increasing.

We came to the conclusion that public health events are not just public health events. They can be used as vehicles for agendas that are outside of the public health domain. I think that public health communicators and journalists really need to understand that this is happening and it's not accidental, "Oh, this is happening." These topics are being used in ways beyond just public health.

From this research, we also had four categories of misinformation that we have sorted through. These include misinformation about false cures, a lot of misinformation about either conspiracies or profiteering, for example the Gates Foundation, the World Economic Forum, they designed the pandemic.

There's also another category that we have that is mischaracterizing the disease or a protective measure that is false information, but we can't call it that. It's already misinformation, so it's hard to actually call it the same thing again. And then our final category here is scapegoating, where you blame China, you blame someone else. You're trying to set that blame to someone else and scapegoating the problem. We take those lessons into COVID-19 and we see them reflected very well.

The other thing, when we look at COVID-19, working at the Center for Health Security and having worked on misinformation, it's been really interesting to also see some of the work done at the centre, some of the work that I have done, actually featured in misinformation.

One of our analysts found me in our misinformation dataset, where a clip in which I was talking about misinformation, was actually being used to say, “People are practicing trying to suppress your free speech. Look at this woman. Who’s doing it right now.”

I also co-led an exercise called Event 201, and this was a coronavirus exercise that took place in October 2019. Our whole team have been working, and I was the most junior person who was leading it, had been working in the field for 10 years. Other people who were helping me on this project or who were also leading other aspects of it had been working on biosecurity and pandemic response for 15, 20 years.

We were able to provide a realistic picture of what a coronavirus outbreak would look like. And unfortunately, because we did it in collaboration with the World Economic Forum and the Gates Foundation, and because of those features, it has really been used to say, “These people planned it. How could they have gotten it all right if they didn’t plan it themselves?” Unfortunately, I have a cameo in one of the pandemic movies. It’s very strange to also to be a misinformation researcher, but also find myself as part of this misinformation soup.

I’ll close out with three communications areas of opportunity during COVID-19, or they could also be described as things we are doing badly, that we should do better. And one of those things is maintaining and building trust. Working with trusted community members, influencers, generally people who are really trusted, it’s very important right now for contact tracing and engaging, getting people to engage in those protective actions, but going forward, it is going to be critical when it comes to the vaccine.

That is one thing that I think that we should emphasize in our communications, which we need to work on from a public health perspective. Also engaging with identity. That people, based on their identity, who they think they are, their values, their core beliefs, their affiliations, that’s going to influence what they believe. When public health is designing communications, when we’re trying to communicate via the news media, we need to help engage those different identities, and those different values, and not just speak from a perspective of academia, public health. We’re not speaking to other public health professionals, they’re all already on board. We need to get additional people on board.

Finally, communicating uncertainty. I think this is an area where we lose a lot of trust, and we also have a hard time actually getting that nuance out, and then people are accused of flip-flopping. It’s important to foreshadow change. This would have been really good in the mask conversation. To foreshadow change and say, “Identify what is known, unknown. What’s being done to fill those gaps?”

Because if we said, “Right now, we don’t believe masks are helpful, but we’re doing additional research to understand more about the disease. And if that information, if that conclusion changes, we will let the public know as soon as possible. And here’s the research that we’re doing. Here’s where we think we need to know more.” I think that would have been much more effective.

Also, just to manage those information voids, I think would be very important. That’s my little intro ante here but thank you for having me.

Sarah Everts: Fascinating, thank you. Charles, let's hear from you.

Charles Seife: Thank you very much. I'm Charles Seife. I'm a professor of journalism at NYU, and I like to study. My background is a science journalist. I was a mathematician way back when, and I also am interested in scientific misconduct and how we deceive ourselves in various ways. Let me thank you again for inviting me to this panel because it's a great topic and I'm really happy to be here. But I'd first like to start with the obvious statement that the phenomenon of misinformation and the difficulty that journalists have in dealing with it is not new. But in some ways, the digital nature of information nowadays has changed the game somewhat. Not just in how people spread misinformation, and here's just a couple of simple diagrams that I whipped together to distinguish human beings on social media from bots spreading misinformation, but also the digital nature has allowed us to understand the flow of misinformation a little better.

Here's a diagram in which I followed the spread of a falsehood through social media over the span of 36 hours and watched it spread from node to node. So, the rabbit hole I fell down in the coronavirus epidemic has to do with looking at the quality of data that people are using to make decisions. Not just the average person, but also policy makers and epidemiologists. Because there are problems with a lot of the data. What everyone really wants as a primary measure is infection rates. But we really do have to rely on substitute measures to get them, whether it's number of cases, which has its own problems, number of hospitalizations or the number of deaths. All of these are substitute measures for the fundamental measure that we want to get, which is infections, which leads to our policy decisions. But it turns out that these substitute measures have all sorts of problems, confounding elements. And one that I have been following recently is a distortion having to do with tabulation delays.

The fact that it takes time to count death certificates actually causes some subtle distortions in the metrics that people use to determine how severe the coronavirus outbreak is in a certain area. These distortions actually tend to make it look like you're always on the downside of a peak, when the number of deaths are actually climbing. This is data from New York City in late March. And the official numbers that were released at the time were the bottom curve, which make it seem like everything was flattening out and, in fact, declining when the worst was yet to come. Once you had the ability to tabulate more fully, it was very clear that you were on the up slope as the upper curves showed. Here's the same phenomenon in Florida. This is over the summer. And no matter when you looked at the death rates as officially reported, it looked like the peak was well behind you and you were on the down slope.

And people did make the error of thinking that they were always levelling out, when in fact, in many cases, cases were on the rise. Making matters more complicated, I've also taken a look at how long it takes to tabulate and whether those rates are changing over time. In fact, different localities have different rates for tabulations, which makes it very difficult to compare apples to apples across different states and different countries, which causes another set of distortions. In some cases, it takes only three days, like in the UK NHS system, to tabulate the number of people who've died recently. Whereas in other places it can take multiple weeks, and that

makes it very hard to compare country to country and compare their policies. And the tabulation lags are changing over time. This is, again, Florida. And Florida's tabulation has been getting significantly slower over time, steadily worse, to the point where it takes roughly two to three weeks nowadays to get a reasonable handle on how many people have died on a given day of coronavirus.

These are real problems. These are real issues with how we interpret basal data that everyone uses to make decisions and to understand the dynamics of the virus. How we count the number of deaths is not easy. It is not trivial and it's distorted in a number of ways. And it turns out that the act of counting, not just virus deaths, but other things as well, including people on the census or votes that are going to be collected shortly or are being collected in the presidential election in the United States, has become intensely political. This means that we are primed to question even the raw data coming out of the government. And that doesn't even talk about the predictions based upon those raw data.

Not just in the United States and the Americas, but in Europe and elsewhere too, we have had information that is stated *ex cathedra* from a government agency that turns out to be truly problematic. One would call it misinformation. If the official sources of data aren't reliable, how can we possibly expect that the experts that we journalists depend on, including epidemiologists, to get it right, especially since not all epidemiologists are equally attuned to the problems of data collection. This is a real humdinger of a problem. And I'm very much looking forward to seeing what my fellow panelists have to say.

Sarah Everts:

Thank you for that, Charles. Guy, what's your perspective from your standpoint at UNESCO?

Guy Berger:

Thank you, Sarah. I work at UNESCO. I'm in Paris. Greetings, everybody. You might be surprised to see UNESCO at this, but I would bring to your attention that UNESCO does a lot of work in journalism and journalism education. And in fact, the former director of the School of Journalism at Carleton, Gordon Stuart Adam, was one of the first who started this collaboration in developing journalism education resources with UNESCO. I'm going to do a presentation and share with you some of the work that we've been doing in this area. I hope you find it interesting.

This is the title of the session and I've put the word misinformation in italics because people use lots of different words and misinformation is a very particular word. I'm going to start off talking conceptually. I'll tackle four points. One is the conceptual. How do we define what is this problem? What is misinformation as opposed to fake news and disinformation and so on. I'm going to speak about how at UNESCO we are analyzing how this comes about, and we use the term disinformation as the chapeau; in other words, the umbrella term to cover all of this stuff. Then I'm going to speak about aggression because that's one of the themes of the session, if you go back to the title. And then pushing back. So, just four points. Let me move to the first on the definitions of conceptual matrix.

In this table, you see false and misleading, which is the core of this particular distinctive issue. We are speaking about false and misleading, and I say it's a head issue, not a heart issue, although often combined. Because if you take the example

of anti-vax falsities, these are not necessarily combined with heart issues. On the other hand, often hate speech, for example, will mobilize false information in support of its emotive appeal. But if we're going to treat this thing distinctively, even if it's often combined, we need to say, "Okay, are we speaking about the false aspect, not just a thing like some antisemitic expression or something, which is just an expression of attitude. " We're speaking about the dimension of falsehood which, as I said, can stand alone as an anti-vax thing, or it can actually be combined with hatred. But these are distinctive, so I wanted to make that point.

You'll see in this chart I've underlined the words awareness of falsity. This is something that was introduced particularly by *First Draft*, by Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, that it's not just falsity that's helping you try and understand this thing. It's awareness of falsity. They make this distinction on the basis of disinformation, if you're aware you're generating it. Misinformation, if you're spreading it inadvertently. That's the first criterion for identifying, what is the problem? It's false and it's an awareness of falsehoods. So, they use misinformation in a more innocent way. However, I think it's quite clear to many people that disinformation, in other words, deliberate awareness that you're spreading or generating falsehoods, is the source of misinformation. If you go back to the source, you need to look at that particularly, because that's often where the problem starts. As I've written here, the uninformed become the disinformed and then they can become engines for misinformation.

There's an engine here which harnesses misinformation. In this paradigm by Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, it's very important that you make a distinction between the awareness. But they also go on to a second point, which is what are the motives? For them, if you're speaking about these things, you need two criteria. You need to have awareness and you need to have motives. Here they say, "Intention is important." So, in other words, if you're going to rigorously use their model, you've got to apply two criteria if you're going to identify what is disinformation, awareness and intention. Now, you can begin to see that this is a frame that's fairly tight. In other words, a lot of stuff doesn't fit in this frame. Because you could have people being aware, but they could have good intentions. They could be telling white lies. They could be concealing unpleasant truths. They could have ill intent and could be unaware.

But the way that *First Draft* has set it up is quite a strict thing focusing on these two criteria. Now, one of the challenges that many people have identified here is that you can't always identify intent. It's really hard to identify intent because intent is something subjective. It's something on the part of the sender, and you don't always know when you're seeing the message what the intent of the sender was. And this has led to, particularly internet companies like Facebook, to look at action. Now you're looking at the transmission and you're looking at the behaviours. They say, well, you don't necessarily need to take the *First Draft* intention, but if you take this criteria and then you're looking at the behaviours, behaviours in the production and particularly circulation, you can see that this is one way in which the internet companies are trying to pinpoint, by looking at behaviours, precisely because, of course, they can't always get through to the issue of intent. Then they want to address bad behaviours. The challenge over this perspective, of course, is that

sometimes you can have false information given by identified people. By presidents, for example.

They can be fully identified and they're not necessarily good or neutral, and they're not necessarily false identities. They're not necessarily orchestrating. You can also have orchestration, which can be for good purposes, the orchestration of information as opposed to disinformation. This is a second criteria to try and understand what we are dealing with. Then there's the third one, which is what UNESCO has been focusing on recently, which is the impact. We started with intent as the senders, the producers and the sharers, and we moved to the transmission behaviours. Now we're looking at impact — what it harms. Impact is harms. What's interesting about this is that whether you have ill intent or whether you have good intent, whether you orchestrate it or whether you are identified, you can still have the same harm.

If you are saying to people, "Don't worry about wearing your masks or social distancing," whether you're doing this because you have intention A or intention B, or whether you're doing this orchestrated or just in a transparent way, the potential harm can be exactly the same. Because people can then adopt practices that can, again, threaten public health. You've got three different things here. Whichever criterion you're going to focus on is going to affect what kind of remedies and what kind of responses you're going to have. For example, if you think it's a valid intention, which is a factor, if you think that people have good intentions, but they're just misinformed, well, then you can educate them. You can try and persuade them with fact checking.

Of course, if they have ill intentions, no amount of fact checking is going to change that. On the other hand, when you come to something like misinformation and disinformation about elections, maybe a regulatory response is important there, because you don't have voter suppression causing people to go to false voting stations and so on. A regulatory response might be there because you're looking at the potential harm in that particular case, irrespective of what their motivation is and the behaviours. This is why it's important to start understanding a bit more about what we mean by misinformation and disinformation. My second point is that we have this context in which misinformation and disinformation is rampant. It's because partially you've got this problem of media particularly exacerbated by COVID, and in some cases by media's own inadequacies.

Then you've got media capture. I don't have to tell you which media are captured by purposes that are not for journalism, but for ideology and politics and simple money making. This is a big problem and this is why a lot of media are unfortunately agents in misinformation rather than being agents of information. Thirdly, of course, then you've got a vacuum created where disinformation can come in. These are two publications, and I'll post the link in the chat, that UNESCO did recently about the repression of media, which is particularly misguided when governments do this, because all they're doing is hampering the public-accountable debatable media coverage and making fertile ground for disinformation, particularly in closed Facebook groups, WhatsApp, and so on. These two publications people have mentioned the fake news laws.

In fact, the contour of fake news, as everybody knows, is now very instrumentalized. It means whatever anybody wants it to mean. It's not a scientific concept at all. The fourth vacuum that's enabling this to come, disinformation, misinformation, is the stalling on transparency. There's a website called the COVID-19 Tracker. It shows how many governments have stalled in terms of right to access to information. This publication on the right, this is one that we've done and I'll post the link again. And then you have the internet companies, this side that says Avaaz. Avaaz is a civil society group. They're trying to assess disinformation and misinformation, but they don't get the data. They have to try and make informed guesses as to how many views. They say 3.8 billion views. But we don't know because the internet companies are not transparent.

That's the problem. That's the context we live in now, trying to understand how disinformation and misinformation works in this context. These are graphics from two publications I'll speak about, but I think we can posit safely that disinformation, particularly when it's intentional is antagonistic, adversarial, because it can only claim its own truth by discrediting other truth and by attacking truth tellers, particularly when they're vulnerable, when they're susceptible to misogyny, to racism. I think we have to understand that disinformation doesn't coexist in harmony with information and the producers of information. Disinformation is inherently aggressive. It affects all the spheres, and I'm not going to go through them all here, but everybody can come up with examples of all these things. And the list keeps growing.

This is a serious, serious problem for people who believe in journalism and who want to see information as something that can really help society make informed decisions. But you've got, across the board, this disinformation and not just colonizing and consolidating, but combining with fear and hatred. It's using facts in the head to deal with the heart and combining them. To end up with my last points here, to push back, I think that we have seen in this period a greater demand for independent news. That's very good. We've seen that journalists' skills have grown. That's very good. We've seen many media have started or reinforced their disinformation beats. And precisely because of the crisis, we have an opportunity to strengthen support for media freedom, for journalistic independence against media capture, for media viability, which is so critical, for support measures and for transparency.

It's not entirely gloomy. Although there's this challenge to information from disinformation in a context that's stacked against information, but we have got some signs of hope. Just briefly to end up, even before COVID, UNESCO produced this book *Handbook for Journalists*, which is in all these languages, plus another 10 coming, and people have voluntarily translated this because they think it is useful. Even some governments have supported the publication because they are worried about the geopolitical dimensions. Even though they themselves may be involved in disinformation domestically, they want their journalists to be able to know about the truth sandwich, to know about how to not just identify and fact check, but also to dig in. Then we've got this publication in English and French, the *Disinfodemic*, which is a concept that we have, which are two interesting analyses of deciphering and dissecting.

The one I want to just take a minute on speaking about is this report, which is long. It's 350 pages, but knowledge doesn't always come just in tweets. This publication makes sense of complexity, because it looks at 11 different categories of disinformation. By the way, it has a research analysis, a gap analysis. It assesses them in terms of effectiveness, responses and in terms of the impact of freedom of expression. Because much as you find disinformation is a challenge to freedom of expression, some of the responses to disinformation are also impacting freedom of expression. It's got recommendations in favour of journalism and it has a 23-step tool. One of the keynote speakers in these lectures, Julie Pocetti, is one of the co-authors. I just want to say concepts have consequences. I hope I've made that point. Disinformation has consequences. One has to only look at how its harnessed, particularly with hate speech in countries. It has impacts on the elections. It has impacts on climate denialism and so on. I've made the point that this information exploits a vacuum, and we have this problem that it used to be that there was a vacuum and information could fill the vacuum. Now, instead of planting seeds, you've got to confront a lot of weeds that are thriving in that space. I've tried to explain why disinformation inherently is aggressive, and I've tried to say, well, it's possible to push back because there are signs. Thank you.

Sarah Everts: Thanks Guy. Great. Thanks for that taxonomy of misinformation, disinformation, the background behind that. Tara has mentioned that there were definitely some lessons learned from the Ebola crisis, but we know that any time there's any kind of crisis whatsoever, misinformation and disinformation are sure to come, but how has COVID misinformation, disinformation been unique? Are there any unique trends about what's happening with COVID 19? Is there anything that is unique and different? Let's start with you, Jessica.

Jessica McDonald: Sure. I guess none as necessarily compared to Ebola, but this is a very scientific issue. If people don't feel that they have a strong scientific foundation, which I would say most of the public doesn't feel super strong with, it can be kind of scary. They don't know what to expect, and they can find things online that seem technical and well, therefore that must be true. It seems like people know what they're talking about and people don't have the skills to know that no reputable scientist believes that and why. I do think compared to past crises, this is all to some degree scientific literacy and being able to know which sources to trust. That doesn't necessarily mean you have to have scientific information in terms of knowing which new sources to get your information, but it does help to some degree.

Then I would say one thing that's cropped up is, scientific preprints. It's the first time they've been growing for a while, but this is the first time where, the regular public has really seen a lot of them. They're really important because that's the fastest way to get new information out and people are learning all the time. That's what this process has been trying to do, get new information about the pandemic out, but people need to understand that preprints have not necessarily been vetted and it could go either way. It could be a perfectly fine publication that is, it was carefully done by scientists who took their time and thought about it and have good data, or it could be completely made up or it could be by people who are not knowledgeable about what they're doing.

One of these instances happened relatively early on in the pandemic. I was involved in debunking the idea that the coronavirus was bioengineered as there isn't any evidence for that. One of the early claims was based on this preprint that came out that said that part of the virus, when someone looked at it, someone who had some training, but was not actually a bioinformatician, saw that the sequence appeared to have these repeats that were similar to HIV and therefore that meant that this was bioengineered. And other bioinformaticians, who actually do this for a living, immediately looked at it and were like, no, that doesn't make any sense at all. But a common person who just sees this as a preprint, it's by somebody who has a Ph.D., how are they supposed to know the difference?

So that is very different, I think, and it is challenging. That has been an important thing that I've been trying to think about. I don't want to say preprints are generally unreliable because that's not true. I think there's sometimes a false dichotomy that people have been set up as saying, "Oh, well, don't believe the preprint." Well, really, it could go either way. It could be perfectly fine and be published in science the next week, or it could be completely baseless. I think people do need to be aware that a lot of things that are put up, depending on the preprint server and the degree to which those are vetted, they could be completely baseless. It's just that's been a very interesting thing and trying to convey each time I write about a study that's either been published or is a preprint, trying to say it's unpublished at the same time we've experienced in the same pandemic, published studies, having been just as bad as any bad preprint.

We've had both situations and explaining that and keeping people informed, I think has been one of the most unique things that I've been following. I will also say, as was mentioned earlier, the idea of uncertainty in trying to convey that so that we don't have to backtrack so much. People need to understand that everything is evolving and the information that's provided, it's going to change. We're not one hundred percent sure at any given time of anything, but we can try to explain, well, here's where we are and why we think this is true now. And yes, giving a foreshadowing that this could change, is I think really important. It's important for people and public health, but it's also important for a journalist to not present things as a hundred percent sure, because that's never true in science. Things can change and you want to leave that open for people to understand.

Sarah Everts: Right. You want things to change. That's a good sign.

Jessica McDonald: Usually it's good.

Sarah Everts: Who else wants to jump in on, what's unique about misinformation this time around Tara? Go ahead.

Tara Kirk Sell: I think it's part of the misinformation mix that when you compare what happened with Ebola to what's happening right now is just the volume and the attention, the volume of information, the attention that COVID-19 had as compared to Ebola. Some people were worried about Ebola. Some people never even thought about it. They were worried about sports and their social life and everything that was going on around them, schoolwork, whatever. Now in a lot of places, all we have is the inside of our houses and COVID-19. And in the United States, we also have the election.

When I looked, we pulled a 1 percent Twitter feed for Ebola and a 1 percent Twitter feed for COVID-19, and since I do a lot of my work with hand coding, just thinking of volume, managing the volume of tweets about COVID-19 is just overwhelming. When you think of the news media articles, when you think of everything out there that people have to read and look at and manage, I think there's a lot of information and there's just so much attention on COVID-19 that it changes the landscape based on what we've experienced before and may provide an opportunity for misinformation to flourish.

Sarah Everts: Interesting. Charles, it looks like you want to say something.

Charles Seife: One of the things that I've noticed is that people tend to be treating the outbreaks like a political affair. You've got polls, and you're trying to make predictions as who's going to win a horse race. I think that a lot of problems early on, especially with scientific experts losing credibility, comes from a lot of poorly executed predictions of numbers that turn out not to be true. Once you've made a prediction that fails, it's a very easy weapon to use against you. Of course, the knowledge evolves and your predictions are supposed to be getting better over time. But anytime you are able to put your opinion out and it turns out not to be true, then you have lost so much credibility. Unfortunately, it's a lot of the authorities early on who were making the mistake of doing that firmly without any real hedging of the predictions.

Sarah Everts: Interesting. Felix, what's your thought?

Felix Simon: Briefly piggybacking on shots, I think this is totally right. A big part of the problem is actually science coverage, especially when it comes to preprints as Jessica said, and just general science coverage of scientific studies, some of it is good, but a lot of it is also really bad, even in high quality news outlets.

If you think, for instance, just recently, when *The New York Times* published this big article about Trump being the biggest driver of coronavirus misinformation, and note the word "driver" here, it's a causal claim. If you then actually went back into the underlying study, this was in no way supported by the methodology, but this wasn't pointed out to the reader.

Something that Scott and I actually found in looking at this, is that despite everything we know about science, of good health communication or good science communication in general, there's still basic mistakes in these articles where you make grand claims based on a single study, which sometimes hasn't even been peer reviewed, where you don't make the extra effort to ask more than one or two experts on the topic and give them the material in advance and say, "Hey, what do you think?"

This all of leads to a situation where a lot of supposedly credible information comes from news outlets all around the world and people consume it are then to some extent, rightly frustrated about experts, of changing their opinion or predictions from one day to the other, because this is what the articles are saying and that's actually something where journalists and academics have to look at themselves and be much more rigorous and apply more scrutiny to the way science is covered.

Sarah Everts: Thanks. Guy, what are your thoughts? What's new here?

Guy Berger:

I think the public, I'm speculating and generalizing, but I think the public would be far more aware about contested truths and falsehoods than previously, precisely because so much content is political football in this. It's called information by some, disinformation by others. I think this concept, I disagree with Felix, this concept of infodemic doesn't come from the World Health Organization, but they've popularized it. This has become more understood by the public that you have information and you have disinformation and you have misinformation and that's confusing to try and deal with both of those. To take on Jessica's point, I think the public, one hopes, will also realize that besides these three things, there's also the unknowns and that science is a process. And policy, you can't say is true or false because policy is based on many assumptions, and it can only be assessed in retrospect as to whether its assumptions were true and its predictions turned out to be true.

I would hope that people are more savvy about content because they're being exposed to stuff that's clearly not in one universe of certainty. People are beginning to realize there are some truths, there are some clear falsehoods that are contested, people are weaponizing this stuff. At the same time, there are some unknowns and that those unknowns are a legitimate sphere for debate. Maybe that kind of culture could apply to other forms of life, like climate change that people begin to realize that it's not a debate, that there *is* global warming. Hopefully people realize that now, what do you debate then while you can debate responses to it? Because those are policies. Because that is the area of the unknown. In a nutshell, I hope that the media and information literacy of people is raised by this very intense and close-to-home exposure to content during the COVID period.

Sarah Everts:

As individuals who obviously care about information and misinformation, how do you think that the news media should split its time? I mean they have restricted resources. Where's the sweet spot between covering the fire hose of COVID-19 information and then playing catch-up with fact checks and spending time debunking information when there's so much good information out there to be sharing, or that should be shared? What kinds of misinformation should be focused on to debunk when mainstream media does take that time? How do you triage the debunking? Jessica, you're nodding your head. I'm going to start with you because obviously you can definitely answer the question of triage and then I'll open it up to everybody else in terms of where's that sweet spot and how to triage.

Jessica McDonald:

I can speak for what factcheck.org does. Basically, the way we're set up, is that I would cover anything political that a politician would say. So, I would automatically do that. Then we would have the Facebook people focusing on the Facebook posts. And one thing that did happen is they were told to prioritize claims that could affect someone's health. If someone actually believed that drinking tea would cure COVID, along with about 50 different miraculous cure claims. So prioritizing information that if someone did believe it and we have no data on what that they do, but that it could be dangerous. That was that's one way to prioritize.

When it comes to me, obviously things that the president says just by virtue of it being the president takes precedence. And it depends on how widely was his message spread? It was pretty well covered by most of the press, anytime the president did say something that was out of step with public health guidelines or basic facts about what we knew about the coronavirus at the time. I do think the

media covered that fairly well, and there were mistakes or sometimes too much time can be spent focusing on the president. That's definitely something that happens. I don't have a perfect answer for how to do that. One of the things that we don't try to do, especially for example with Facebook, if there's a post that only has a few re-shares it's not prioritized. So, the other metric is how widely has it been shared?

We do try to prioritize that way. Our equivalent version of that is how well-known was the president's comments or whomever we were talking about? How far did it get out there? And do we need to tackle that right away? Or is it something we can cover later, especially when we have more information. A lot of claims are vague, but you do want to get a place to debunk information if it's false, have a place where people can go to for that information, which is where the fact checking sites have a specific role. We can focus on that and it doesn't mean that all outlets have to do it, but at least there's a place for someone to go if they do have a question, especially if they see something in their Facebook feed.

I think it is important to have that resource for people, but it's not like every news outlet needs to be covering the same information, but I do believe there is a role for some redundancy in that. That way people can see multiple different fact checks from different organizations and people can say, "Okay, well, they're all saying essentially the same thing." I don't know how many people would actually read all five fact checks on the same thing, but if they wanted to, that information could be there and they could see that, "Okay, they're all in basic agreement, maybe I should not believe this." And in the same vein, you will see differences among the fact check organizations in terms of the ratings and which things we pick apart as being wrong or misleading. If someone were to research it and to look at a specific claim in detail, they would come away with a pretty nuanced understanding, hopefully. That's how we do it for now.

Sarah Everts:

Okay. Anybody else want to jump in on this?

Tara Kirk Sell:

I can talk from the perspective of kind of how we've managed misinformation about our centre itself and I think that the art of debunking, Jessica's an expert so she can speak to this more, but it's not just saying, well, X is false. It's hard to describe why something is false without leading some people to have the falsehood stick more firmly in their head than the true information. If you can't do that, sometimes it's better to just let it go. And sometimes addressing something may make it seem as though you're part of the conspiracy in driving this truth underground. So it can be very tricky. We have addressed some misinformation or disinformation at our centre in some ways where we have said, "Tried to put out focus on the truth that our exercise was about X, it was a fictional exercise," and not say "Event 201 wasn't planned by us." We don't do that.

We also put out a check through the *Yan Report*, which was the report that said everything was bioengineered. In that, we try to emphasize the way that you would expect good science to be done, the expectations and the citations that you would want to see, instead of trying to do anything that would make those claims seem more likely to resonate and stick in people's heads. So, it's a trick, it's a very difficult thing to do. I'm no expert, but it's something that we have struggled with and I think is very, very difficult. Sometimes you just have to, if it's not harmful and if it is a

harm, I think can be both health harms, but it also harms trusted institutions and belief in protective measures. But if it's not causing that kind of harm, then I think sometimes it's just annoying and you have to have thick skin about it.

Sarah Everts: That's interesting. Anybody who else want to jump in here?

Guy Berger: Okay. Three quick points. I think what's important is to recognize that a lot of stuff is not fact checkable because as I said, it's in this area of legitimately contested truth. So, we have to be careful about Thomas, his opinion, and so on. When we speak about fact checking as such, of course, it's difficult to do because it's easy to fabricate facts and it takes time to disprove them and to show whether and to what extent they can be proved. But further, I think the challenge is that facts don't appear in a vacuum. They're part of a narrative and they're combined with so-called facts or combined with real facts. In a narrative, a lot of basic facts can be presented and interpreted in different ways and given different meaning and different significance. So, fact checking has got to somehow wrestle with this concept of narrative, which is bigger than the concept of an individual unit of fact checking.

Finally, I'd say that the problem with fact checking, well, the problem for fact checking, which many fact checkers are recognizing is that if you play that game, you're always on the back foot. You've got this development now of rebunking rather than debunking. In other words, to anticipate what kinds of disinformation, misinformation are coming up, and to basically start defusing it before it really gets traction. Of course, there's a debate then about if you are giving it oxygen, which comes to the techniques of two sandwiches and other kinds of techniques. I think that it's an important exercise, but it faces a lot of challenges about how it doesn't end up checking the wrong stuff. How it doesn't end up always on the back foot and how it doesn't miss the bigger picture of the narratives.

Sarah Everts: Charles, go ahead.

Charles Seife: I would echo that as well. From my perspective as a science journalist, I have seen disinformation about climate science, climate change for many, many years. A lot of journalists fall into the trap of what is termed the "deficit model." The belief that there's just this absence of knowledge in the people who believe the wrong thing and that by explaining it, and explaining it again, and explaining it more loudly, they'll eventually get the right view and we've seen through experience that is not what happens.

I do think that fact checking has a very important role in the ecosystem, but it is not going to win the day when it comes down to it. We have to have other mechanisms for dealing with this misinformation. What causes people to change their minds is not the fact that the truth is just out there, but other dynamics that force the Overton window to shift in a place where people start finally believing it. It's more than a collection of facts and debunked misinformation that causes people to change their minds.

Sarah Everts: Felix, do you have any thoughts on this?

Felix Simon: No. Actually, I think all the other participants have brilliantly said the most important things. Lots of fact checks have come back to the original triage against the top level

is for me the most important bit. When it comes to smaller claims, there is always the risk of blowing them up artificially, if you start a couple of them. And that's just one more thing that has been said already.

Sarah Everts: Let's dig into that this pro bunking, or as Guy said pre bunking. It feels like fact checking is this perpetual game of catch-up. There's certainly a desire to be more proactive. And yet, of course you don't want to throw oil on the fire. But if fact checking is an antiviral, what's the vaccine against misinformation? What can we do in advance without throwing oil on the fire to anticipate misinformation and nip it in the bud or even before it buds.

Tara Kirk Sell: I think there's two things. One is to get all the stakeholders moving in the same direction at the same time. We're not going to solve this problem by just having Facebook do something. We've got to have Facebook move forward. There is a role for government. Although I don't think it is determining what is true or not, but in coordination and perhaps in helping to stop state-sponsored disinformation campaigns. But a limited role for government, a role for news media, a role for public health and health communicators, and doctors doing a better job, a role for also the public. We need to look a bit closer, a good ticket. Take a good look in the mirror and say, what do we as members of the public and also as communicators, what do we need to do, to do a better job of managing our information diet?

What can we do and how can we have members of the public have better digital literacy? And that's not just for elementary students, that's for 65-year-olds. This is across the age spectrum. I think that we need to recognize this as a problem. Tackle it aggressively and say, this is something that everyone has to be all in about. And that's a huge ask. That's no simple solution there, but I think that it's going to require everyone to move forward. Then people are like, "Well, what do I do when I'm faced with misinformation and disinformation? Like across the Thanksgiving table or whatever." And I think we already heard Claire Wartel's name mentioned today, but she says, "Don't mute your uncle. You've got to engage, and you've got to engage respectfully. You need to make that connection."

You talk about those tactics we've taught. I think that's what a lot of the research has shown. When people understand the tactics, people who are spreading misinformation or disinformation in this case, they are better at spotting it and to encourage people to verify using resources that Jessica is putting out and then to provide alternative information sources. But even then, it is still hard because if someone says, "I don't believe the CDC. And the WHO is a bunch of people who are part of the conspiracy," it is difficult at that point to say, "Well, what information would you trust?" I still think that doesn't solve the whole problem, but it can help get a first step going. And that conversation, it's more retail than it is wholesale.

Sarah Everts: Jessica, you had some thoughts?

Jessica McDonald: I think this is a hugely important question. Especially with a COVID vaccine hopefully coming out. I've already been asking myself, "How are we going to approach this? What can we do in advance?" One of the things that we have done was put out a Q&A about vaccines and getting people primed for what they can expect. What are the different designs? Just some basic information. I think the rollout and

getting people to take the vaccine once it's been shown to be safe and effective is going to be a huge thing. I don't believe fact checking necessarily has a huge role in that because I do think it would probably be most persuasive to be coming from someone else. For people who are hesitant about a vaccine, that has to come from someone that they trust personally or have a connection with. Or someone, especially in minority communities, to hear it from someone in those populations.

So, that's going to be a huge component that we obviously don't have anything to do with. But I have been trying to think about how we can approach this. And one of the things that I've been doing throughout the pandemic is trying to provide more than an adequate explanation for why we think something would or wouldn't work. Or why we think something is safe and providing more of a rationale. Oftentimes there are fact-checking articles that are written where it just says, "Oh, there's no evidence for X." There's very little further information given. If someone is already predisposed not to believe you, perhaps because you're citing the CDC and the WHO as sources, we have heard from readers who will say, "Yeah, I don't believe the WHO." So, it is difficult, but I just try to provide a logical rationale, usually from an expert that I've interviewed who can explain in detail. We don't have evidence for this, but here's why, and go into somewhat lengthy description.

I don't know if people are actually reading this, but if you can provide a more detailed explanation about why something isn't likely, that can help in the future if a similar claim comes out and hopefully if they've understood what you've written, they can apply the same logic to it. I don't know how effective that is, but that is something that I have been trying to do. Not just that X is false and leave it at that. We try to provide more detail.

Sarah Everts:

That speaks to several points already made that there's been this problem with a lack of fundamental understanding of how science operates, just in terms of the maths debate. It is good when science evolves and it's not a black and white thing. Explaining how the sausage gets made or the vegan tofu thing, sausage gets made and is useful. Anybody else want to step in here and talk about how can we fight misinformation proactively. Go ahead, Felix.

Felix Simon:

I just wanted to take the chance to congratulate Tara, because I think she's found one of the main weaknesses in our public narratives around misinformation. Where we talk of something like a vaccine against it. And apart from the question, if we question the language of health and communication information context, we should probably talk with public health measures because as she brilliantly said, we actually need long-term structural solutions. Not just have one fixed solution because that doesn't exist. I mean, this entire conversation in the past hour, is about misinformation, disinformation being very complex problems, having different origins. And that's actually the total opposite to the virus. Well, the virus caused the disease and you can hopefully do something to fight against it in terms of a vaccine, but that's not same thing with misinformation.

We need all these long-term and structural solutions to solve this problem. And one key thing in all this is a lot of this work also has to come from a lead. Some political leaders because if they don't care about the truth, if they don't care about protecting the institutions and experts that are tasked with giving us reliable information about

all these things, then we are really in big trouble. And that's one of the things we've really seen in many different countries as they've reacted to the pandemic. That in places where politically leaders don't attack experts and don't undermine trust in authorities, usually these countries have fared a bit better than places where this was not the case. And that's something we somehow have to address in the mid to long run.

Sarah Everts:

Interesting. Anybody else want to step in on this? Go ahead, Guy.

Guy Berger:

If I can make a comment. I think it is true what Tara said about the public having better capacity. And I think it's true what Jessica said about trying to step up the fact checking. And it's true what Felix said about the government, but in the end, what's really fanning this fire are the internet companies and they're attention-grabbing algorithms. Everything else is fiddling around the edges in a sense, because once you start shifting the burden to the users, they're going to continue trying to clean the mess.

And the mess is being made by systems that have developed and that have gotten beyond what I think were originally envisaged. It's very clear that the way that these algorithms are working and there is some pushback. But it's good that they're working to give the air and the permanence to misinformation, disinformation, and all kinds of other stuff. That is the content that we might not want to see in society in terms of civil discourse and human rights and so on. That's the one side, but it's what they are committing that is a problem.

And then what they're omitting is also a problem. For example, I know some fact checkers in South Africa, and they manage through crowdsourcing to identify this information spreading on WhatsApp. What they would like to do is to have a relationship with WhatsApp, once they debunk certain information in WhatsApp. WhatsApp, then circulates the debunk to every sender on WhatsApp where the metadata shows where this has been spreading. But WhatsApp won't do that.

So, it's an origination problem but then also not really systemically trying to address the problem. Unless we can try and get these internet companies to step up more and also be much more transparent about what they're picking up and what they're doing, what the impact is. Then I think all these other efforts are going to continue to be dealing with symptoms. And meantime, I wouldn't say it's a cause, but the driver, the power that's really amplifying this stuff is the internet companies, which are the intermediaries, which are doing the transmission. So, the supplier side, we have to deal with to some extent, governments, we have to strengthen the good suppliers side. We have to deal with providing alternatives and skills. But the transmission side, this is the elephant in the room.

Sarah Everts:

We just have a few more minutes before we wrap up.

Tara Kirk Sell:

Do you mind? I totally agree that there is a role for social media companies to improve their algorithms and improve their ability to highlight true information and get it to the people who are seeing this false information. My caution is that I worry about Facebook determining what's true and what's not true. Just like we worry about governments doing that. That's why I say that Facebook and other social media companies need to have strong changes to do that. But that's why I also think

that we need to see changes across the board, because I don't want to see that we depend on Facebook to tell us what's true, or what's not. People should be able to also determine what is true, or what's not. We do a better job communicating, across the board we do a better job. I don't want to depend on social media to be successful and also be unbiased.

Sarah Everts: Thank you. That's a great wrap-up point. We just have a few minutes left. If everybody has one point moving forward, as we face the second wave or continuation of the first wave as the case may be where you are. What should practitioners, journalists, public health officers, other communicators be thinking about with regards to misinformation? What's the take home message you'd like to share with the audience? Let's start with you, Jessica.

Jessica McDonald: It would just be for everyone to remain skeptical about things that don't really make sense online. To ask those questions and to try to come up with your own sources of media that you trust. See if that matches with other people that you know. I think moving forward, one of the biggest things will be a COVID-19 vaccine and getting people to understand that even if we do have it, this is going to be a long stretch getting through it. We should not be thinking of this vaccine as an immediate solution. I'm worried about the vaccine being safe and effective. I am worried about people not wanting to get it. And part of that's legitimate, like this is a new vaccine that hasn't been tested as rigorously as past vaccines that we have had. Although we will be getting very good information about it, but that's going to be a huge thing to look forward through the rest of this pandemic.

Sarah Everts: Thanks. Charles, what are your thoughts?

Charles Seife: For consumers, I think the one thing I'd want to emphasize is provenance. Whenever you have a bit of information that matters to you. Try to figure out where it comes from and not just go one step back but dig to the roots and that will help you a tremendous amount in figuring out whether or not to believe it. For those who are producing information, I think we have to examine why people should trust us and work towards an ecosystem of trust. And for me, to a large extent that is based upon transparency — transparency and information and the way we come to our conclusions.

And I fear that, piggybacking on what Jessica was saying about the vaccine, for example, if the FDA is not transparent about the data and the reasons for which it is approving the vaccine, we shouldn't trust it. Even though they have been a trusted authority in the past, they can't just rely on that to move forward. We really do need to be able to see the workings behind the wall. So for me, the big take home is transparency is really, really crucial, especially when there's doubt about it.

Sarah Everts: Thanks. Felix?

Felix Simon: I think for me, one of the take home messages is that many organizations should be careful not to turn into misinformation sources themselves, especially if it comes to science coverage. So, be really critical, be rigorous. Probably go for the long-form article, which explains a bit more rather than rushing out something based on a single study. I'd also be careful when it comes to crushing certain narratives about the info apocalypse happening very soon, because we have lots of evidence that this

is actually not the case. But it can contribute to a situation where this is taken up by policy makers to push through overly ambitious solutions. Which actually makes the situation worse rather than better.

Sarah Everts: To your first point, the preprint server article is like a first draft of a press release. And if you don't get outside comment, it's like just using and repurposing a press release. Tara, any last thoughts?

Tara Kirk Sell: Just that I think that we should stop using our tribes as our shortcuts for determining what's true and what's false. We can use our own brains to figure that out. Rather than saying, "Well, I believe in this political identity, so I will believe everything coming out of that." Like Jessica said, we need to have skepticism. We should have skepticism across the board, not just for the people who believe differently than us.

Sarah Everts: One last point. Guy, what's your take home message?

Guy Berger: Well, I also wanted to respond to Tara. These internet companies, they cannot avoid making some content judgment. At the moment, their algorithms are set up to skew the playing field. So that the stuff that comes to the top is this informational content, because that's what's captivating. If they're going to change the algorithms, they can't become a completely neutral playing field because it's too much content. They have to make some judgment calls. But here's the thing that what we're seeing and what we've seen with COVID is it's not a binary between removing what's false and keeping up what's true. There are huge number of options. There's a scale of things from labelling through to promoting authorities of sources, through the demonetizing, through to not just taking content down but de-listing people if need be. To stopping distribution, to combatting coordinated inauthentic behaviour.

There's a ton of options. If there's one thing the media could do, it can try and say they should be a more nuanced approach that should avoid the take-down stuff at all or even the exclusion of people as far as possible. But that the present system is, unfortunately, working in favour of this information. And of course, there's some people who won't agree with that because this information is benefiting from this. But the companies cannot be neutral in this issue. In the end, they've got to come up with some values and they have to use their full range of techniques. I think that's what media can really push them to do.

Sarah Everts: Well, thank you for that diversity of thought and opinion. Thanks everybody for joining us. Thank you to our speakers for sharing their thoughts and insights.



JOURNALISM IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

LOCAL MATTERS

PANEL

Moderator: Randy Boswell, Carleton University
Speakers: Patricia Elliott, First Nations University of Canada and University of Regina;
April Lindgren, Ryerson School of Journalism; Mark Glaser, Dot Connector Studio;
Willy Pavlov, *Halifax Chronicle Herald*

Randy Boswell:

Hello, everyone. Welcome to this panel of the Journalism in the Time of Crisis conference. Our panel is titled Local Matters and it's described this way: "Local news publishers and journalists are essential sources of trusted information for COVID-19. How has the pandemic impacted local journalism?" To help us illuminate this subject, and I'm sure others in a related vein, I would like to welcome the following folks.

Mark Glaser is a consultant and advisor with a focus on supporting local and independent news in America. He's joining us from Santa Fe today. He was the founder and executive director of mediashift.org. He's an associate at Dot Connector Studio and innovation consultant at the New Mexico Local News Fund. He is a long-time freelance journalist and from 2001 to 2005, he wrote a weekly column for USC Annenberg School of Communications' online journalism review. This summer he was the author of a significant, research essay called "Three Ways Local News Initiatives are Serving Crucial COVID-19 Information to People in News Deserts in the United States."

April Lindgren is a professor at the Ryerson School of Journalism and is the Velma Rogers Research Chair and principal investigator for the Local News Research Project. Her current research is on local news poverty and working with colleagues from University of British Columbia and Royal Roads University, she spearheaded the creation of the Local News Map.

Also joining us is Patricia Elliott. She's a freelance magazine journalist and alternative media practitioner, as well as a faculty member of the School of Journalism at the University of Regina. She has been cited numerous times by the Canadian Association of Journalists and National Magazine Awards for outstanding investigative journalism.

Welcome to you three, and welcome to all of those out there who I can't see, who are listening. We also may be joined by Willy Palov. He's a sports reporter with the *Halifax Chronicle Herald*. He's the president, as well, of the Halifax Typographical Union. He's also on the CWA Canada national executive, and he's been a reporter at the Halifax paper for 25 years. He is, I believe, in the middle of a working day in a working newsroom, and so he may have to fit us around that schedule, but we're hoping that he'll be able to join us as well.

Clearly, the pandemic arrived at a time when all news organizations were already facing severe challenges, financial challenges, technological challenges, and others, as a result primarily of the collapse of the traditional advertising market in the news business, as well as the proliferation of the numerous digital news competitors, which has its bright spots and its drawbacks for traditional legacy news organizations, of course, and a number of other forces that have been undermining a long-standing economic model for the news business. Professor Lindgren here in Canada has been leading the documenting of this local news desert phenomenon. And Mark is going to be able to bring us some insights about that in the United States.

The news company SaltWire's shutdown of so many of Atlantic Canada's community newspapers this year due to the added economic strain of COVID-19 is just one symbol of how the pandemic has been like a double whammy for many news organizations, not just in Canada, but also in the United States, the United Kingdom, and beyond.

We also heard this morning in a keynote address from Julie Posetti, the global director of research with the International Center for Journalists, about how profoundly the pandemic has been affecting the mental health of journalists around the world, stoked, in fact, by anxiety about challenging working conditions and potential job losses. And we know that those pressures are felt at media organizations large and small.

At the same time, credible news sources, especially at the local level, given the variable localized nature of the pandemic's severity, have necessarily played, or should have played, a vital role in keeping citizens informed about public health risks and COVID-19 containment guidelines. Local and regional news operations, where they continue to function effectively, have no doubt been indispensable for government and health officials in helping to spread awareness among the general public of how not to spread the coronavirus, what government supports have been made available, and so forth.

Of course, where does a community gather, even if it's only in a digital space, to learn about the loss of long-time community members, the courage and sacrifices of front-line workers, the special hardships faced by businesses, educators, and the vulnerable? It's community news sources who are bringing those stories and those struggles to life.

That's the framing of this panel. I'm sure that's a bit of a downer in the way that I've framed the discussion, but I'm happy to know that there's going to be some uplifting perspectives conveyed over the course of our discussion, which will follow. And Willy, I'm very glad that you've been able to join us.

Willy Palov: Sorry about that. I was punching in the wrong code, so I figured it out eventually. I was seeing numbers and letters, but anyway, I'm here now.

Randy Boswell: We're very glad to have you. And I think what I'll do is I'll ask April, perhaps, if you don't mind, to take it away with some opening observations, maybe help set the stage for our discussion.

April Lindgren: Thank you so much, Randy. And it's great to be with everybody. I thought I would try to take a quantitative snapshot of what's been happening in Canada with the onset of the pandemic, and then put that into a broader context of what's been happening to local journalism over time. I've just got a few slides I'll share. So, after the declaration of the global pandemic on March 11th and the lockdown of local businesses, we started to see, of course, waves of announcements of layoffs and pay cuts and closings that are supposed to be temporary or permanent. It was clear that something out of the ordinary was happening. And so along with the Canadian Association of Journalists and JSource, we created the COVID-19 media impact map for Canada. The map tracks closings, layoffs, pay cuts, various types of service reductions. We also started a spreadsheet where we've been tracking temporary and permanent layoff announcements. This tracks all types of media, both local and national, but the reality impacts are on local news organizations. I drew on my experience with making the Local News Map and that allowed us to build the COVID map relatively quickly once we decided to do it.

When it launched on April 29th, we had five weeks' worth of data since the onset of the pandemic. Since then, we've been doing occasional updates and producing fact sheets and publishing the full sets of data as we acquire enough new information. The most recent update was posted yesterday. As you can see from this example, each of the markers on the map is accompanied by a description of what happened, the location, media type, language of operation and all of that data is available along with the summary fact sheets that we publish whenever we do an update. We also provide links with each marker so that people know what our sources of information are.

On this last update we added 37 markers. I was discouraged by that, as you might expect. Some of them are recent developments, but in other cases, we were only able to verify and add information about decisions that had been made earlier in the pandemic. So, it's not necessarily 37 terrible things that have happened since mid-August when we did the last update. Although there's a fair bit of that I have to admit.

Since the pandemic was declared on March 11th, this is just a snapshot of some of the data. Fifty-one news organizations have closed or temporarily closed. Almost all of them have been community newspapers that publish fewer than five times a week. Twenty-four of them in fact are community papers that have permanently closed, along with two private radio stations. One hundred and forty-one news organizations have announced layoffs of editorial and non-editorial employees, and it's important to know that both the numbers reflect both groups of workers. And that number is, I'm sure, low.

I say that because one of the challenges has been that quite a few of the larger companies have announced cuts but have not been very forthcoming at all about which of their broadcast outlets or digital properties or newspapers on the ground have experienced the cuts. Certainly they've been less than forthcoming as well about whether those cuts are in the newsrooms or in advertising and another back-office operations.

The total we have right now is that 2,553 workers, again, editorial and non-editorial, have been laid off for at least some amount of time since March 11th, and of those we've identified 810 permanent layoffs. In many cases, we don't know if those temporary layoffs are going to turn into permanent job losses. In some cases, people have been rehired. When that happens, we update the information that is displayed with the marker on the map.

This is just another way of looking at the data. It's a bit of a summary. Again, as you can see from the first row, most of the carnage has been in the community newspaper sector, where you can see 30 have cancelled in addition to 48 closed or temporary to closed. Half of those are permanently closed. Thirty have cancelled some print editions, cut back, reduced coverage in other ways, had layoffs or pay cuts. Now, it's important to know that some places have had reduced coverage layoffs and pay cuts. So there's some double counting of what's going on in there, but this gives you just an idea of what's been happening by media type. Daily newspapers, the second category, have also not escaped unscathed. Twelve cancelled some or all their print additions.

I wanted to spend a few minutes to put those pandemic effects into the broader context, and that broader context, of course, being the challenges that local media have been encountering for quite some time now. To do that, I'm going to refer to this other map that we run called the Local News Map. It has been tracking changes to local news organizations dating back to 2008.

What you see here is a summary of some of the data that appears on the map. When we did our most recent update on October 1st, we documented 341 closings of local radio, TV and newspaper and online sites. Again, it's the community newspaper sector that has been really hard hit, those that we define as papers that publish fewer than five times a week. I just wanted to provide some comparison for that.

We also track on this map, what's launched in terms of new operations. We have 130 of them since 2008 or about a third as many as have closed. We published updates. We actually launched this map in 2016, and then we went into the past to collect data since 2008, and we publish updates and fact sheets every two months. We've been doing that for some time. Recently, I've been trying to do some more with the data. I've had a bit of time to put the data into context. One result of that was we recently started including this chart with the bi-monthly reports.

As you can see, here we are in 2020. There are a few months to go in the year, and we know that, for sure, there's at least 24 news outlets that have been temporarily closed. I really hope we're not going to see them join this column in the longer run, but we don't know that yet. Then, for this presentation, I was interested to answer the question of, where are news organizations closing based on our data? I wanted to get a sense of the pattern of losses and gains, in smaller versus larger centres.

We know that all of the closings that have happened since 2008 have occurred in 240 different places across the country, and we mapped them by census subdivisions, which is more or less by municipality. The larger the dot, the more losses of local media have occurred in those locations. You get a sense of a lot of dots and a lot of small dots outside of the major cities. I wanted you to be able to compare that to our dots that are located where new operations have been launching. We know that 95 places have been home to the launch of a new local media outlets since 2008. We did do some breakouts to get a visual sense of what's happening. This is the Golden Horseshoe area down around Toronto. You can see Toronto and certainly see that it's not just in Toronto where there have been a lot of losses, but also a lot of the smaller communities in the area and similarly, for Ottawa. This is Ottawa and Montreal we're showing here in this little bit of a breakout map.

Given the time available, I obviously didn't want to have to show detailed maps for every region of the country, so instead, we just prepared this chart, which I think tells the story in a more concise way. If you look at the bigger cities like Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto, 15 to 20 of them, each of them have lost 15 to 20 local news operations since 2008, and there haven't been all that many start-ups to compensate. Now, this list also includes some smaller cities, but the number that interests me particularly is this line at the bottom that tells us that 233 places outside of these major metropolitan areas have all lost a local news outlet.

The question obviously is, what's left? I think that's where we're headed in the future, to try and find out, does that mean they're left with nothing, or does that mean there's still a paper left in the community? Is there still local radio and local television? What has been the impact of the loss of most cases of a community newspaper because we know that's what has been closing? I'm just going to stop there and turn it back to you, Randy.

Randy Boswell: Thank you, April. That's a rapid and a pretty sobering overview of the situation. I guess, I probably didn't introduce myself at the outset, so I'll just mention for the record that I'm Randy Boswell. I'm a professor of journalism at Carleton University and a long-time newspaper reporter in Ottawa. Patricia, can I ask you to weigh in with some introductory remarks?

Patricia Elliott: Sure. As the topic is local matters, I'm going to speak from a really local and specific context, which is Saskatchewan because I thought that's something I could add that might not be covered elsewhere. We're a province with relatively small urban centres and significant rural and Northern populations. The distances are great, and so local reporting greatly matters. To date, the COVID cases here have been relatively low, but they're climbing. So far, we've had just over 2,500 cases in the province and 25 deaths, but the need for information to keep those numbers down has placed a heavy burden on already reduced newsrooms, and complicating matters is the health authority's reluctance to provide detailed information to journalists. While they do release the names of locations where an infected person has been, the general case reporting is described only in very wide geographic areas like the northwest or southeast. In Saskatchewan, these are huge areas.

This leaves people to glean what's happening around them by putting together Facebook posts. Across the province, people are endlessly and anxiously scrolling social media feeds for anything they can find. I figure among them as well. Among those posts lurks misinformation and disinformation, and this is really dangerous. In my hometown of Estevan, which is a community of 10,000 people, I don't remember a single street demonstration in all my years growing up there, but now, these are regular occurrences taking place on the courthouse steps and fuelled by pseudoscience found on social media about masks and vaccines and by much darker accompanying narratives about global conspiracies headed by the United Nations and the WHO, which aim to enslave us all. Then, even in the annual rodeo parade, among the horses and the clowns, I was shocked to see a float warning people about these conspiracies. More disturbing, I have seen calls to arms on my hometown social media and people answering that they are ready. I mean, this is Saskatchewan. People do have guns here.

This is how people are responding to the pandemic in a growing news desert with fear, with suspicion and with anger. The journalists we have are doing their absolute best. They're clocking a lot of overtime hours, but they're up against a huge tide of alternative information sources, much of it really sketchy. Then, further, they are expected to cover provincial and municipal elections in the midst of a second wave, which is just impossible. Other issues like school board and city council meetings were already ghosts among our main media outlets, but now, they're even fainter ghosts.

To give the lay of the land, there's 58 members of the Saskatchewan Weekly Newspapers Association. Right now, we've lost 14 weeklies in the past decade, that's relying on April's map, mostly in small towns. I live in Regina, which is served by a Postmedia daily that is integrated very closely with the Postmedia *Saskatoon Daily* with really declined local content over the past decade. CBC English is primarily regional in focus, and the French language side, RDI, still invests a lot in local stories but with a smaller audience. We've got some commercial radio. We have the Shoestring all weekly, community access cable, and community radio.

I just want to draw some attention to the last two. A lot of local political information has defaulted to community cable volunteers, including live coverage of city hall, candidate debates during elections, candidate videos and live election night coverage. Likewise, community radio, which is staffed by volunteers, is pulling more than its fair share, for example, providing special children's programming during the lockdown. Their advertising has dried up, being dependent heavily on small shops, restaurants and music venues, which have been closed, and the hosts have had to work from home but without any bank of proper equipment to draw on. This matters a lot because CJTR broadcasts in nine languages. They're the only outlet equipped to reach non-English and non-French speakers with vital information, and they are doing it on the strength of volunteers and fundraising drives.

Another bright spot though is Saskatchewan has a very robust Indigenous community radio sphere with 66 stations serving First Nations and surrounding communities. These stations are particularly important in the North, where other media services are few, and they provide programming in several Cree and Dene dialects as well as Soto, Lakota, Michif and of course, English and French. Their reach and language abilities have made them key frontline players. However, they're not well supported. A 2019 Canadian Commission for UNESCO investigation found the Indigenous broadcasting sector receives only a few small scattered federal grants for individual stations, and they described it as short-term unstable funding. Beyond project funding for individual stations, there is no sector-wide support, and that same report found 100 percent of stations are in a vulnerable position with a third labelled severely or critically endangered.

The federal government, meanwhile, has prepared COVID-19 public service announcements in 21 Indigenous languages, and they're counting on Indigenous TV and radio, but not adequately supporting it. Myself and my colleague, Shannon Avison at the First Nations University of Canada are involved in a project called Intergenerational Learning for Indigenous Language Broadcasting, and Shannon reports that every station she's in regular contact with indicates serious challenges with staffing. It matters because although Saskatchewan is just 3 percent of Canada's Indigenous population, we're home to nearly 20 percent of indigenous language speakers, and Indigenous people comprise 15 percent of our population.

Indigenous communities moved very fast to contain the virus, much faster than the municipal governments did, but nonetheless, they have had a higher death rate with 54 percent of reported deaths in the first wave, despite representing just 22 percent of population. To keep these isolated populations safe, community radio is a lifeline, providing advice and countering rumours that COVID is not a serious threat outside urban areas. There are some micrographs that Community Radio Fund of Canada

offers, but that very name micrograph ensures it's not a long-term solution as noted by the UNESCO Task Force.

Through the Cactus, the community media sector was able to gain access to a portion of local journalism initiative funding, and with LGI funding, Missinipi Broadcasting Corp. in Saskatchewan got support for one local journalist, which has helped, but the journalist also has so many other issues to cover, all of them equally or more pressing during the pandemic such as missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, youth suicide, rising racism, contaminated water and ongoing struggles for sovereignty, to name a few that the journalist is expected to cover.

There's already been a discussion about commercial media today, and I'm not taking away from their work. My intent was just to ensure that non-commercial radio was also front and centre for their ability to reach specific audiences deserving specialized coverage. The pandemic has revealed a critical need for this kind of journalism, including the community-based Indigenous northern and ethnic reporting. They've largely been overlooked at decision-making tables and largely excluded from discussions of funding support. I think in closing, all Canadians owe them a huge debt, and the Canadian government needs to take a closer look at the health of this sector before issuing more public service announcements for them to convey. Thanks.

Randy Boswell:

Wow. Thank you for that. Boy, you guys must have compared notes ahead of time, but April gave us this wonderful helicopter view of the nation and the problems. Patricia, that's a great zoom in on Saskatchewan and the incredible array of issues that arise, much more complex, troubling, in several ways troubling, I should say, than I imagined. Thank you for that. I know there will be some echoes there too, for you Mark who I'm going to ask to speak next, about some of the ways that communities are finding, or trying, in difficult circumstances to find solutions. Mark, please give us your overview.

Mark Glaser:

Sure. Thanks so much for having me on the panel, and it's nice to be joining my colleagues up North from here in the United States and in Santa Fe. I think that we all have a good idea of the challenges for traditional media, for print media in the digital age, and I've been tracking that for a number of years. My focus has always been on, who's doing the right things? Who's doing the innovations? Who's figuring out the solutions to all these problems? So, when I look at what's going on and all the problems that are happening, especially exacerbated with COVID, I think it really comes down to what Patricia was mentioning, which is community. Community first. Look at the community that's being affected by being in a news desert, by having challenges of news and information.

The newspaper chains that own a lot of these papers, they don't care about the communities. They aren't in the communities. In the United States, a lot of them are now owned by hedge funds who only care about stripping those newspapers and making them into ghost newspapers. Each community has unique information, needs a unique audience, unique demographics. To find a solution for that for each community, sometimes, the audience, if the audience is comprised of people who have a good amount of money, then it requires asking them to subscribe, become a member, become a donor. If the audience does not have as much means, then

sometimes, it means getting grant support or other collaborations that can help fill the gap. The local businesses in the area are also key. Who are the local businesses that serve that community, and how can they help in supporting local news and information in that community?

We're somewhat lucky in the United States having the Knight Foundation whom I've done some work with, and I've gotten some grants from them. The Knight Foundation, which came out of a chain of newspapers in the United States, and Google and Facebook are not the best actors out there either, but they've all pledged about a billion dollars to support local news over the next five years. The Knight Foundation, in particular, knows that they don't have all the answers or all the money for everything, so their focus has been on bringing in local foundations, family foundations in each community, who are the people who have the means, maybe even high net worth individuals who can come in and help support local news.

Often, they'll have a convening of all the key stakeholders in the community and say, "Let's talk about a topic like education, or let's talk about it, obviously now, health and COVID, and let's figure out how can all the local outlets in that community support and cover that topic and who would support that financially and make sure that they can cover this topic." I put together a counter program to all the news deserts and problem maps that we've been tracking by doing a Civic Bright Spots Map that I'll share, which I did with Dot Connector Studio for the Knight Foundation to basically show where are all of Knight's investments are happening throughout the United States. Luckily, they were in all 50 states.

Some of the places that are a darker orange are these bigger Civic Bright Spots where there are collaborations happening. For instance, in Charlotte, North Carolina, there's a collaboration of different kinds of outlets including ethnic media, TV, radio, print, and it's being run out of the public library in Charlotte. They're the main hub there. In New Hampshire, they're doing COVID coverage in collaboration. In Detroit, they're using a community priorities model in their collaboration, where they're trying to find out from the community what the needs are there and how can they serve those needs? There are new collaborations happening in Wichita, Kansas, in Buffalo, in Cleveland and other places, all driven by local funders, local foundations and people who care about the community.

While foundations have a weird relationship with local news, they have their priorities. Just like any other sponsor or advertiser, they have to understand that when they give money to local news, there's going to be independence. There's going to be editorial independence, and they're going to cover what's important, and so, a lot of them, it's a little bit of a learning curve to understand that. There's also been new models. April talked a little bit about the rise of these new publications. A lot of them are digital first. In the United States, we have the Institute for Non-profit News (INN) and LION Publishers. LION's focused a little bit more on for-profit online publications. INN focused on non-profit news. Those organizations are thriving right now. They've grown by leaps and bounds. This year alone, they're now over 300 members each, and they give support to these new newsrooms that are cropping up, and ethnic media are now being included in those organizations. At LION, they now have, with support from Google, this new lab to help start up more publications in news deserts.

INN has INN Springboard to help kind of launch new publications, and INN has also been involved in NewsMatch, which is a way for foundations, national and local foundations, to support non-profit newsrooms around the country during a big drive from November 1st to the end of December, where when people donate to those publications, these foundations will match every donation and then, sometimes, getting a local foundation, they'll get a triple match for each dollar they raise. Last year, I believe they brought in over \$40 million. This year, there's 267 publications that are going to be part of NewsMatch that launches in about a week.

There's also interesting movement by for-profits. The local media association in the United States started a COVID fund where they helped for-profit publications get donations from their audience for the first time using a foundation in fiscal sponsor model. With that drive, 225 publishers raised \$1.6 million using that fund, and now they've launched a new Center for Journalism Funding with six publications. To raise \$2.25 million is their goal on a six-month program, also supported by Google.

Facebook has also started and just launched a sustainability accelerator for 20 newsrooms that are owned and run by people of colour. They each get \$100,000 for a six-month program with coaches to help them out. Sustainability is a part of that program. Not only would they get the money, but they'll also try to become sustainable.

So, they're trying to do something too. Facebook has said they're going to be giving a \$5 million investment into local news and especially local news run by people of colour. Finally, I just want to talk a little bit about New Mexico where I am. I've been helping out the New Mexico Local News Fund with a revenue initiative where we've been helping grantees that are for-profit, non-profit, radio, TV to give them some help during COVID with the money that they've lost, but not only just giving them a grant but also making sure they have a revenue plan in place for the long-term and come up with new revenue streams.

Some examples, *Taos News* newspaper got a grant from LOR Foundation that basically helped triple the power of advertisements from local businesses that advertise with the paper, so if they bought \$100 worth of ads, they get \$300. It basically tripled the power of their ads, and that brought in over \$30,000 for the publication. GPK Media, which is in the small town of Truth or Consequences, New Mexico, they have an AM radio station and a newspaper, and they started live streaming funerals to help people out who couldn't go to funerals because of COVID. They're live streaming sports. They also have gotten an influx of ads from candidates during the political season, and so, they decided to let the candidates get a guest DJ spot for an hour where they could basically play their favourite music for an hour and pay for that. Here in Santa Fe, the *Santa Fe New Mexican* started a new business around live streaming events and doing virtual events for people in the community. They've already brought in over \$50,000 in that new business that they literally just launched in the last few months.

There's a lot of different efforts out there, very creative efforts to survive, and I think it's going to take a mix of for-profit, non-profit, there's even a co-op model, a cooperative model that's being explored by various publications where the audience becomes part owners of the publication. There are all kinds of ways that people are

trying to figure out new ways of surviving and being sustainable. I do have some hope even in these dark times that there are some bright spots out there.

Randy Boswell:

Thank you, Mark. There was a lot of exhilarating information there and examples. I know that those aren't necessarily going to replace the livelihood industry in the newspaper and the legacy media world, but it's pretty encouraging that there's some solutions at least being formulated though. We could go on for some time, and that doesn't even include the 45 minutes I would love to spend just talking about a town called Truth or Consequences, which is just ritually symbolic as well. Anyway, I'll move on. Thank you, Mark. Willy, we'd be very pleased for you to give us a sense of your perspective from Atlantic Canada.

Willy Pavlov:

I had some questions about Truth or Consequences too, what a great name. Also, Mark, did a lot of the same themes and touched on the things I'm going to talk about. I'm going to work a little bit backwards and end up talking about COVID, only because I think a lot of the things that all journalists are working on and media companies, the COVID experience made them more acute, at least in my experience here. By way of background, I am a sports reporter. I've been at this paper for 25 years and we're almost 200 years old, *The Chronicle Herald*. For a long time, and we still are, the largest independently owned paper in Canada. We were lucky in the sense that we had one family that was directing us and we've since become our own chain by way of acquisitions, but I'll circle back to that later.

A lot of what we talk about here all the time, just like you are all talking about, is how to keep the customers we already have, but how to also drive new customers. Because the print model, we hear it all the time, is "Dying." We hit the older demographic bias papers, we need the kids and the millennials and everybody else. When you're in a newsroom like I am, I think we always end up with a bias that we think journalism solves everything. The way we looked at it here and our men who had their own ideas, was to get this transition, but not to transition to the web that is, but not to lose our print subscribers because the phrase they like to use is "that's what keeps the lights on."

It's a fine balance because we're all talking about now there are fewer resources to pay for journalism, photography to hire ad sales reps, all those things that you need to keep the money coming in. You have to be really selective about where you spend that money, but in the newsroom, we think you hire more good writers, more photographers, more everybody. And your focus doesn't change just because we're a legacy company. It doesn't change that what people still want is hard, reliable news. And when you start with that, you can also give informed perspective by way of columnists, even guest voices, politicians, whatever you want. The danger though is the way we're seeing the web, particularly social media companies driving information that's watered down and supposed to have a mass appeal. It doesn't really attract anybody.

It doesn't keep them on your website and it's mass produced so there's nothing that connects people with whatever it is that's in those pieces. I'm going to give a long history lesson, but I'll take it back to before, almost five years ago now. As I said, we were a long legacy print company and management had decided in a lot of ways, justifiably, that they had to change that business model, where they weren't

investing as much in editors, just for the purpose of paginating. So, putting those stories physically onto the page and running them out and they went to outsource that with cheaper people, which was actually a good idea that we agreed with. But along with that thought process on their end came the idea that others can produce the rest of the product as cheaply, which means you can hire almost anybody to write.

You can create photos and videos with people who may not have experience, let alone journalism training. So, the balancing act it started to, I think anyway without criticizing my own employer too much, it's swung a little too far the other way. Where a lot of our product became a little bit watered down and what we found is that you can do that for a little while, but in the long-term, it's like any business, if you're selling something that's a little bit of a lower quality your committed customers will start to waiver. We're dealing with that now, because after we settled from the strike again, justifiably the message and the mandate was, we need to push our resources more into locking down a reliable web base of readers. And we all agreed that's really important, but because our staffing levels went from, 65 newsroom employees down to 25.

Everybody here can do the math, that's going to make it tough to balance priorities, web priorities, quality, all of those things. And the worry inside the newsroom, probably because we are traditionalist, older people like myself with the miles I have on my resume, we worried that we would lose our older demographic, meaning people who would be 60 or above, often 70 or above, subscribing to our paper for simple things like, obituaries puzzles, crosswords, the sports section, they would like to read the box scores. These aren't items that really translate well to the web and they're not interested in consuming their product there anyway. We definitely were behind the idea that we have to promote our website and we also had to make sure we didn't have huge losses. I won't skip too far ahead to that because there's other stuff I'll incorporate into that. The second thing that happened while we were out on the strike, which was really technically more of a lockout, and we could have another panel discussion about the reasons that went into that and how all that went.

But while we were out, our paper acquired 34 different media properties in Atlantic Canada from Transcontinental. We went from this one stable source, we did have some weeklies, some free giveaway papers, but all of a sudden, we became a newspaper chain. So, we have the next thing to a monopoly down here in Atlantic Canada, which despite the circumstances and the timing of it, we are pretty excited about. We went from about 300 employees at the *Chronicle Herald* to now a network that had around 700. And there were signs of steady revenue from all of these smaller papers with traditional readerships, that was a big positive.

What we found was that the management of a network is challenging, we've all seen Postmedia, Transcontinental, you name it. You have people who have their own ideas of what a big audience wants and some of that spilled into our management. What I mean by that is all of a sudden, for example, let's take our paper. We have access to the content from 34 others, well, the temptation is let's fill our pages and fill our website with stuff we've already paid for and on paper some of that makes sense. But what I would say is if I circle back to what I mentioned at the start, which is that I think that content is the be-all and end-all, while every customer at every paper, at least in my biased estimation, wants something that's interesting to them. They want something as grassroots as a story about a small business in their small community,

which is not interesting to someone who reads our paper in St. John's. And that's not to say that we are running a similar story out of St. John's in the Halifax paper, but I think you get the idea.

Randy Boswell: Willy, I'm just going to press pause for a moment and then I'm going to come back to you, especially for the COVID impact. But I know that Patricia has to head off to a class shortly and I just wanted her to get one more shot at responding to some of the other things folks have said. So, I will come back to you after we give Patricia a chance to give some final thoughts before she goes teach her class. Thanks, Willy.

Patricia Elliott: Thank you. And sorry to interrupt, I have students waiting on me. I don't have a lot more to add, I would second the switch to online doesn't work in all cases, that's often a more urban solution. It doesn't work as well in rural areas or in the North where the internet connections just aren't strong enough. They don't have high-speed internet and people's orientation is to radio in the North and to print in the rural areas for those reasons. But I listened with interest, I am also very interested in seeing the development of cooperative models and non-commercial models, so that was great to hear some of that. And I'll just leave it at that, unless there are any questions people have.

Randy Boswell: Thank you again for joining us and providing that great perspective. Like I said, I think there really were some echoes and cross overs, particularly what Mark, was talking about. Thank you very much for joining us and have a good class.

Patricia Elliott: Thank you. Have a good rest of the session, it's been really wonderful listening to everybody.

Randy Boswell: Thank you. Now we'll return to Willy. You can pick up your narrative from where you left off. And thanks for letting Patricia, have that word.

Willy Pavlov: Of course. I'm almost at the COVID part, but going back to what I was saying, coming out of this work stoppage here, our management continues to work on different revenue streams while we're out. And again, I raised this journalism bias again, because what we saw was an effort to take shortcuts with creating revenue by introducing a lot of sponsored content, people were paying for a business story or those things. Now they were labelled and they were identified as not journalism necessarily, but our worry was that not everybody's going to understand or appreciate that these are coming from different sources and especially if they are presented in an adjacent way. They might not have been on the news site, but they're on parts of it. All credit to trying to innovate and trying to find new ways to bring in money in different ways. Let me backtrack.

We're coming out of COVID here. As COVID hit, like I said, we're doing a lot of experimentation with different ways to raise money, different ways to lock down a younger audience, different ways to monetize the web. We choose the hard paywall. Hard paywalls had a good start and then levelled off and it is quite gradual and incremental now. People don't like to have to pay for news when they've been getting it for free, but that's a 15- or 20-year-old problem and the genie was out of the bottle there, so it's hard to go backwards. Just as we were stabilizing in March, like a lot of others, we were hit here and what happened, like in a lot of places, was the ad revenues just dried up to the point of almost 90 percent losses.

That's because with especially the printed product you're advertising, car dealerships or restaurants or Costco or retail outlets, you can't and would not advertise retail outlets that are all closed. So, everybody hit the pause button, revenue flattened and we had a 40 percent layoff across the network, temporary layoffs. Like I said, we were at 700 employees at that time, and I think the number that came in was close to 300 people put on temporarily layoff. The ones who stayed were all asked to survive on either 75 or 80 percent of their salary. It was really a collective effort on everybody's part that people who were on the CERB while they're waiting to see if the pandemic lightened up and also those people who are still working. Everybody had to sacrifice and then over time, we were lucky here in Atlantic Canada, that we were able to get the virus under control quite a bit better than a lot of places in Canada.

And that was because we don't have the population density of Toronto or Montreal, so our cases were easy to trace and we've been under 10 since, I want to say mid or early May. It was at that time and then into June, that the 300 people laid off, I would estimate maybe about 25 percent of those came back. Because some businesses were starting to open, the restrictions were lessening. And then as we got through into the summer where we had plateaued with our COVID management around Atlantic Canada, that only started our local economy, really at the grassroots level. We couldn't re-introduce our whole national engine or anything like that and it was at that time that our company realized, that's not going to happen until COVID has a vaccine and the whole world really gets back on track.

At that stage it was time to decide how many permanent layoffs to have. The total number was close to 150 people out of 700 were laid off and now we're moving forward. What we learned during that time was all those old lessons I talked about, that people were relying on our paper, physical printed product, but also the web for that really basic COVID information that everybody needed to know how are the cases today? Our top web hits almost every day were what's next for COVID, and that lasted through the first few months. Then, by sad and unfortunate coincidence, we had a long run of very dark news events happen here. We had the biggest mass shooting in Canadian history, we had two separate pilot incidents of people from here dying, which reinforced to us unfortunately, in a morbid way.

I will say, I hate this expression, but the old idiom that if it bleeds it leads, hard news, dark news, it drives our business. That was a reminder to management and everybody that we really need to have hard news as our baseline. And then once we have the hard news, we need experienced commentary, we need experienced feature work. We noticed an increased demand for that, our web engagement in those areas on long features went up. And that was around the same time that they brought me back because I was off myself for two-and-a-half months. Sports were not being played obviously, but we reached a point just like a lot of places, that people, as much as they crave that hard news, had a little bit of COVID fatigue, and needed to think about something else was the sentiment, right? So even though there weren't a lot of sports being played, and this extends out to our entertainment and lifestyles writers, feature writers, even our web and video producers, was that people needed more of a diversion.

There's a window there too, if we're going to add to our product, people do like more of a longer read. They do like human interest stories and all those things. The last

thing that we learned was particularly where we are all isolated, is we really need to excel at driving traffic through the web. And at my age, I'm probably not an expert on how to drive a demographic in their early 20s to Instagram. We are trying that, but if people who own these companies are investing, it would be the lesson from COVID that let's get them hooked on our product through those social media outlets. And then let's keep them by delivering day after day that hard news and that more in-depth stuff. Which is all to say, if we had all the resources in the world is great, but we really have to hit our targets really precisely.

Randy Boswell:

Great. Thanks Willy. I mean, it was a great compliment because I know a lot of what we talk about is big picture stuff and broad themes, and nothing is more visceral than someone who's in the thick of it and caught in a sense in the COVID layoffs but fighting to try and figure out a path forward. Thank you for taking us on that tour. Let me go back April, to your thoughts about some of the other things that have been raised here, there's so many issues that arise. Even here in Canada this week we've had a major announcement from the NewsMedia Council of the country pressing the Canadian government to go after two of those organizations, you mentioned, Facebook and Google. I'll just hold this up in front of my camera if I can.

It's a newspaper ad from today, "This isn't a David versus Goliath story." And they say, "It's actually David and two Goliath's. And of course, it's Google and Facebook that news publishers in Canada are attacking for sucking essentially all the profits out of the news business and demanding that the Canadian government follow an Australian model for supporting journalism in Canada. Our federal government has actually committed hundreds of millions of dollars to financial aid essentially to the journalism industry. Lots of debates about exactly that and whether it's a wise direction. There's a lot of things happening in addition to the things we've raised here and April, I'll throw that out there and invite you to bounce off some of the things you're hearing.

April Lindgren:

Even though I've spent a fair bit of time tracking what the problems are, I'm actually most interested these days in what the solutions are. I think there's a few things that are happening that give us some hope. One is the change of rules that allow news organizations to get charitable status so that they can accept donations and issue tax receipts. We haven't had that. Our tax laws haven't allowed for that until this spring. I think that's opening up the potential for maybe more philanthropic support. One of the things I'm looking at is what are models that have worked elsewhere and what are the best practices that would work here to have the biggest bang for the buck? The other thing is I'm increasingly interested in the ideas of collaboration and by that I mean collaboration between news organizations.

If you've got three news organizations left in a medium-sized city and they're all struggling on a shoestring, the public interest it seems to me would be advanced by collaborative work, at least on some of the projects that they do rather than the old dog-eat-dog model, where we're both merchants gnawing at bones anyway. I think there's some potential there. I also think that increasingly, journalism schools are starting to look at ways to play a role in supporting their communities or at least some of the local news ecosystem in their communities and beyond, I know we certainly are. The Institute for Investigative Journalism out of Concordia has been doing extraordinary work. I think that there's some potential there, which would be

great for our students and potentially for news organizations as well. I just had one question for Willy, I know that SaltWire had closed temporarily 21 of those weekly papers it had acquired, and I was just wondering what's happened with those? Are they still closed?

Willy Pavlov:

Not all of them. I wouldn't be able to tell you which ones, it's been in dribs and drabs, the re-openings and some are just as we were talking. We get a weekly update every Friday about which way the revenues are going and things like that. There might've been one coming in today because, last Friday, they reintroduced two that I can remember and I also know that, for example, PEI, they're still working through how to approach that market, whether or not they should.

There are two main papers there: *The Charlottetown Guardian* and the *Summerside Journal Pioneer*, and along with those big themes I was talking about whether we need to go hyper-local or whether we can walk a line and combine coverage from papers that are at least nearby or close to each other. They're trying to decide what to do with the *Summerside Journal Pioneer*, whether they can move it over to a weekly and combine it with what they're offering through *The Guardian*.

It's a day-to-day thing and I'm not even exaggerating because most of the weeklies that we had created and some of the weeklies that we acquired weren't subscription-based, it was all ad-based, and so during COVID, of course, these are places you hand them out at malls and you have stores advertising and that's how you generate them.

So, I don't have the latest list of which ones are back, but I know they feel like those are good vehicles for the whole network really, because, like I said, they're so grassroots, the content itself is fairly inexpensive to create.

People aren't looking to those products for their hard-hitting news. They're looking for very community-based stories. Our hope is to just kind of tread water and if we get all these re-openings full on again, then maybe there's going to be a re-launch, because although they are print products and I know we're always fairly focused on the web side of things, I think there's still a good market for those papers and without putting words into our management's mouth, I think they feel the same way.

Randy Boswell:

Thanks Willy. And thanks April.

Mark, I want to swing back to you and I'm going to read back to you something that you wrote this summer. You reviewed some of the kinds of information that April shared earlier about the closings, and that Willy was talking about too, out in Eastern Canada. I'm quoting you, "The situation for people in news deserts is dire and even worse during a pandemic when timely information is a matter of life and death."

And that's compounded, as you described here, by COVID-19, where it was actually difficult to keep track of the progress of the pandemic.

But the piece you wrote for the Knight Foundation goes on then to describe things like texting services, and again, a number of the other, I would say, green shoots or bright spots that you see emerging from this, under the dark cloud of the other side of the story.

Do you want to describe a few of the ones that you think are perhaps most exciting in terms of the ways that communities have responded to closures and a lack of community news businesses and whether they are a prospect for sustainable journalism going forward, rather than just stop-gap measures?

Mark Glaser:

Yes, I think that it was interesting doing this story because I was initially told to go find someone who has plenty of news sources and then talk about, compare that to someone who's in a news desert and how bad it was for them. I started going down that path, and as I did, I started to find what interested me more was how are projects trying to reach people in these places and who's doing it well, and who is doing it in a sustainable way, where it might be a potential business model that will work?

I think texting is really interesting because while Patricia had said online websites don't always work for everyone. I think texting is something that, largely everyone has a cell phone and uses it pretty often.

There've been these services like GroundSource, which is a way of reaching more people in communities through texting services where a news organization will ask people to text in information about something or how they're experiencing something. And one of the ones that has an interesting business model is Subtext, which basically is a texting service where reporters directly will text paying subscribers. Usually it's about \$5 a month to subscribe. There's a political reporter in San Francisco who's been using it and for the people who really care about politics, they're the real politicians and lobbyists and activists and all those people, that is really valuable information, probably worth more than even \$5 a month, to be honest.

The reporter will send stuff to them in advance of their stories, talk about what they're working on. There's a way to respond and interact with the reporter. It's not like a discussion group, it's just one way, the reporter to the people, and the people can discuss one-on-one with the reporter. So that's a very interesting one that I think has some potential.

The other thing is around what Patricia had mentioned, which is immigrant media and public-access TV, which has existed for a long time and has been hit hard by COVID as well. But there have been bright spots out there with some of these, including one in Hawaii that covers the island of Maui, that had people out really covering communities in ways that no one else really was. And again, it can be volunteers in the community who are doing that, and it doesn't sound sustainable when you think about it. Community radio, community media, but these are people who really care about the public and there's a lot of interesting programs out there to train people to become community journalists in a way.

There's City Bureau in Chicago, their program is called "Documenters Program," where they have people go and cover board meetings and things that the media doesn't really cover as much in government, and they're expanding their service out to other cities in the United States too. It's interesting to see all these different efforts.

I'm not going to say that they're going to replace everything we've lost with newspapers, but I think we have to really rethink who is providing us with news and

information in an accurate and trustworthy way, and how we're going to support that without thinking about print, print is dead, TV, radio. Let's just think about what each community needs to figure out where is their audience, where does the audience get their information and try to be there for that audience. If it's Instagram or Facebook or those places, they don't have a good reputation but, you can set up a private group on Facebook where you can make sure people are moderated and you can make sure the information is better.

I just think that it's not about the medium necessarily, it's about where is the community and how to serve them.

Randy Boswell: I just have a quick question. I'm notorious among my editors over the years of writing 275-word leads and I'm just trying to figure out with texting, what's the expression model? Are they short blurbs? How does it work?

Mark Glaser: Yes, it's funny. I talked to some of the people who do it because I was curious about that too. Do you really want this big, long text showing up at eight o'clock in the morning? And he said it's really important to get to the point, say exactly what's going on, have a quick hit, get it done in a few quick bullet points. So it's definitely a different kind of writing.

I would feel like getting a text is such a personal medium. You're usually getting it from friends and family, and so personally, I feel like it's a little bit invasive in a way, but now I think people really are getting used to getting commercial messages, and they're texting and when they subscribe to something that's useful and valuable, you really have to make sure that those texts are relevant, they're important. You're not doing it too often. I think some of them try to do it just once a day, short hits that work, but it is a totally different way of communicating and you have to be cognizant of that for sure.

Randy Boswell: Great. On the subject of green shoots and bright spots, April you said that's something that you're interested in as a counter pose, to the desert and poverty side of the equation.

Are there particular ones April that you're seeing that strike you as perhaps the brightest of the bright spots, ones where perhaps it's a different model of revenue generation or a different concept of the way news is delivered, or maybe give us a sense of what stands out for you as a true bright spot in the horizon?

April Lindgren: I think one of the obvious ones for me is the collaboration between the journalism schools across the country, news media organizations as part of the Institute for Investigative Journalism's big annual investigative projects.

The project that the J-school students from the journalism schools and the collaborating news organizations did last year is nominated for a Michener Award in public service and it was for a large project that looked at lead contamination in municipal drinking water systems and the failure of municipal governments to be transparent about what those levels were.

So, I think that there is potential there. First of all, because investigative journalism so challenged, particularly in small news organizations, which have experienced

major newsroom cuts and there's not the sort of leeway or the willingness to invest in reporter's time to do bigger projects. That, to me, is an example of a potential we should be thinking along those lines and collaborations, certainly as schools of journalism, which would be great for our students and it's great for the communities that benefit from access to this kind of investigative reporting as well. So, I would flag that one for sure.

Randy Boswell:

I mentioned earlier the ongoing negotiation slash implementation to some degree of government funding essentially or tax adjustments that will benefit major publishers and other funding that will be directed towards local news initiatives. Is the government state-sponsored journalism option something that is discussed much in the United States, Mark?

Is it something that interests you Willy as some way for SaltWire, for example, to shore up its enterprises, and April as well across the board for supporting journalism. I'll leave that open to the floor, but it's an ongoing subject in Canada.

Willy Pavlov:

What I'll say is that right as the pandemic was starting, right when we were benefiting from the federal program to introduce new reporters into our newsroom, we got two reporters across our network, and there were six in total who filled roles that wouldn't have otherwise been created and that created jobs for people who wouldn't otherwise have had them.

In our newsroom, we have two federally funded reporters. One of them covers health issues. We had lost our health reporter through layoff and the other, they describe her role as a "new people's" reporter, which was mostly about immigration and they're young, hungry reporters who have both done a really good job and have connected well with our readers. I think we might actually have a new hire this week so we're hoping that the new hire is one of these two new reporters.

What that tells me is it was a really fruitful way to introduce young journalists into the industry, because, at the risk of denigrating our union body, well the people who have survived like myself have been around for 25 years and I don't want to be an ageist, but I don't have the same ideas as someone in their early twenties. Our demographics through layoffs, we came back and we only had three females left in our 25-person newsroom. It was just the way it worked out. It wasn't by design; it was people taking buy-outs. As we all know, it's really hard to infuse new people into newsrooms and if the government's assistance in this particular program is doing that, I have evidence that it's working and it's been a great resource to our paper. So, props to our government for helping out that way.

Randy Boswell:

The government might want to know more about that situation for a forthcoming advertisement. Mark, your thoughts about this issue?

Mark Glaser:

Yes, the United States is far behind Canada and United Kingdom and so many other countries when it comes to public support and government support, starting with public media downward, there've been a lot of calls by especially the legacy media to have this kind of government support for local media. So far, I think New Jersey as a state has provided that and a little less than what they initially were planning to give, to create kind of a commission to help give out that money to different local media. I think that the focus on that support at least in the United States should be on

independent media, independently owned media community, media run by people of colour, under-served media, these news deserts. That is where I think that money should go. There's always a question when it comes to government money. What are the strings that are attached to that? What will you have to do? What will the government expect? Can the government just turn off that spigot at any moment?

Like any other source of funding, I feel like it's maybe a piece of the puzzle. I think we've all been searching for this silver bullet, this solution that's going to solve everything. That's not going to exist. We're going to have to come up with a lot of different ideas and figure out what works in each community and if there is a government that understands they need to support independent journalism then I think that's great, that the government supports it and I think it's needed obviously right now.

I think this thought that government's going to come to the rescue, be this white knight, is misplaced. People think if Biden wins the election, there's a definite opportunity for this kind of support and there was this small business program to support small businesses during COVID that did go to some local media. But I just think that's a little bit misplaced. I don't think it's going to be the answer. It's going to be one of many answers, really.

Randy Boswell: Okay, thanks. I know April, you mentioned earlier the adjustments in regulation or rules around philanthropic support for journalism, did you see that or in a sense, the tax changes and the other direct funding options as a significant sustainable, I'm not going to say solution, but a partial solution to the problem?

April Lindgren: Well, I would just reiterate Mark's point about there not being a silver bullet. I think there's going to be all these pieces of a bigger puzzle that used to be filled by the advertising piece. There will be some philanthropic support, but if you look at the size of the philanthropic sector in Canada, relative to the amount of advertising that's disappeared over the last 10 years, it's certainly not going to be everything.

In terms of the government programs, I sort of struggled with this, but then I thought, okay, look at all the other sectors that government subsidizes, and they don't do it because it makes perfect, beautiful, economic sense. They do it for all sorts of political and policy and basic human quality of life issues.

Here we have journalism, which we know is a really important public good, and to stand on some sort of economic principle that it should survive on its own when it's clear the private sector clearly is failing to be able to do that. I've come around to the idea that we need to have support for journalism, and we need to hold our nose, do it and put the controls in place.

Now, I would also say though, I think there's a real obligation on the part of news organizations to be transparent. Willy, I think it's great that SaltWire is getting two reporters from the local journalism initiative but, they did just lay off a hundred plus people and I'm wondering how many news jobs were laid off there, and so that's kind of smelly.

Willy Pavlov: Yes.

April Lindgren: I can sort of have some sympathy for it because we're in extraordinary times with COVID, but there's a lot of news organizations that I think are being less than transparent about what they're doing in their newsrooms. Some of whom may well be recipients of local journalism initiative funding. I can maybe turn a blind eye to it because of where we are at this point in time with COVID, but down the road, I don't think that shouldn't be allowed to wash.

Willy Pavlov: No, I agree. Yes, that became a separate dispute on our end here as I said, in my role as the union president out of our newsroom, we had 10 journalists on temporary layoff and we had these two funded journalists still working, so it was a major dispute. We could fill another hour and a half with that.

I will say that fortunately, we were the one software network that brought everybody back to the newsroom. So we were really pleased with that. And I will say that of a lot of the layoffs, were not in the journalism sphere, but we did definitely lose a lot of reporters and photographers.

The priority was to maintain it as much as you can. If we isolate, like you were saying, this issue as a COVID-related blip, I'm okay with it.

But you're right, I think long term, we can't lay people off to soften the payroll and drop new people in that are funded through different channels. It's not a great wash for long-term sustainability, especially if we're seeing people unfortunately laid off at a difficult age, people who would be 50 and have a hard time transitioning into another career. Like myself, they're in sort of the no man's land, if you want to call it that. I don't want to see that, that's for sure. We'd like to see people get to the finish line, or we'd like to see people coming in at the start who can make it to the end through 35 or 40 years in the business. Again, we could spend nine hours on that.

Randy Boswell: I think we could spend nine or more hours on so many of the issues that were raised today, but I see that I'm actually out of time for the panel and it just happens to coincide with the moment when the sun has risen up and is blasting me here in Ottawa, which I'm sure is a good symbol of something.

There have been a lot of issues discussed, and I know there are some dark clouds, but I am glad to hear that there are some bright spots, some green shoots and some exciting ideas happening as well on the local news front.

I guess we'll maintain vigilance and hope for the best. Thank you all for participating in this panel. Obviously, when we were talking about the intersection of journalism and the pandemic, the rubber doesn't hit the road quite as clearly as it does at the local news environment and so thank you for illuminating aspects of this issue for our audience and for an unknown audience to follow because this recording of our talk will be available and this is probably going to lead to publications down the road where our conversation will have a further life.

Again, thank you all for coming. It is much appreciated.



JOURNALISM IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

THE EVOLUTION OF JOURNALISM EDUCATION

PANEL

Moderator: Allan Thompson, Carleton University
Speakers: Patricia Elliott, First Nations University of Canada and University of Regina;
Karen Fowler-Watt, Bournemouth University;
Jennifer Leask, Langara University and University of British Columbia;
Maryn McKenna, Emory University

Allan Thompson: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the final formal panel session of our two-day symposium Journalism in the Time of Crisis. This is a panel about the evolution of journalism education in the wake of the pandemic, but before we begin, we have a special event that we're going to introduce into the schedule. Patricia Elliott from the First Nations University of Canada and University of Regina is joining us. Patricia is going to launch the new journal from J-Schools Canada, a new academic journal called *Facts & Frictions*.

I want to turn the floor over to Patricia who is doing triple duty today because she was on a panel this afternoon, then she had to duck out to go and teach her class, now she has a guest speaker who's filling in for her for a few minutes while she rejoins us to launch the journal. Patricia, please go ahead.

Patricia Elliott: Thank you. And hi everybody. Good to see you all. Normally for a publication launch, I guess we'd have champagne and fancy food, but I'm happy that you're here and I can just make this announcement from J-Schools Canada, which represents journalism programs across the country, that we're very pleased to announce the birth of a new peer-reviewed academic journal, *Facts & Frictions, Emerging Debates, Pedagogies and Practices in Contemporary Journalism*.

The title comes from a name, the journal contest winner, who is Chelsey Devito, and she was a Carleton grad student at the time. I just love that a student won the naming contest and I love the name that she came up with as well. We're going to publish on the J-Source platform, which is Canada's number one journalism news website, and the journal will be online only and open access. In this way, your research is going to receive the widest possible audience. We're seeking scholarly articles, as well as shorter research notes about, for example, research and progress, or research findings. Also works of journalism, and what we probably have in mind here is maybe some graduate student projects or faculty projects, possibly some previously released works with permission of the original publishers, and then reviews, book reviews, film reviews, exhibitions, textbooks and so on.

All of these submissions will be blind peer-reviewed according to regular academic publishing standards, except for the reviews. Submissions may be in English or French, and they will be published in the language submitted with the abstracts being bilingual. Note that we also are accepting podcasts and presentation videos for the notes and reviews, and also works of journalism in any format. We're re-imagining academic publishing, taking full advantage of the multimedia features of an online platform.

The deadline for our first issue is May 1st and the submit button is, as of today, now live. In addition to faculty research, conference papers and graduate student work is also really encouraged and welcome. We see ourselves as also playing a bit of a mentoring role as well. You can find further information on the J-Schools Canada website, and I just want to thank you all very much for joining us in this very special moment. Thank you all.

Allan Thompson: Thank you very much, Patricia. And anyone who has any questions or wants to follow up, feel free to pose those in the Q and A site here. I'll keep track of them and I'll get them to Patricia.

Patricia Elliott: I'll look forward to seeing all your submissions.

Allan Thompson: Great. Thank you very much. We shall carry on. I would like to introduce the three panellists who are joining me today. Jennifer Leask is a journalism instructor at both Langara College and UBC. She's a researcher and a former CBC news producer. Jennifer was a lead researcher on a project on teaching journalism in the time of COVID-19, impacts on pedagogy and practice. This was co-authored by my Carleton colleague, Susan Harada. Jen will be talking to us primarily about that project.

Karen Fowler-Watt is a Senior Principal Academic and formerly Head of the School of Journalism, English and Communication at Bournemouth University in the United Kingdom, where she is this evening. A former BBC journalist, Karen is research theme lead for journalism education in the Centre of Excellence in Media Practice at Bournemouth. Her research interests focus on reporting marginalized voices and re-imagining journalism education.

Finally, Maryn McKenna is an independent journalist, author, and Senior Fellow at the Center for the Study of Human Health at Emory University. Maryn won the 2019 AAAS Kavli Gold Award for Magazine Writing for her piece, "The Plague Years," published in *The New Republic*. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Maryn has taught an open online course to over 8,500 journalists about covering news in a pandemic. She previously worked for many years at the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, covering the Center for Disease Control full-time.

That is the group that is joining us today. We agreed ahead of time that each would take about 10 minutes talking about their work and then we will get into a discussion. Certainly I encourage anyone who wants to pose a question, there is a Q and A field down in the bottom. Jen, over to you.

Jennifer Leask: Thank you, Allan. And thank you for inviting me to be on this panel. I want to start by acknowledging that I am a guest on the traditional and unceded territory of the Squamish and Lil'wat people, and I think it's important to start with that acknowledgement generally, but particularly in this forum, because I think what we're trying to do here is look at the shifts that we're seeing in society and in journalism schools and figure out a way to do better. I think that territorial acknowledgement is something that we've been doing more in journalism schools and is symbolic of that.

When I think about the theme of journalism in the time of crisis, I feel like we can say there are lots of industries that are in crisis because of the pandemic. I feel that journalism school has not been left aside. We've had problems with what we're trying to do because of the pandemic as well.

Yesterday, I was in the session with Dr. Theresa Tam, who if you don't know is Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, and one of the things she said that really struck me was this idea that the pandemic has put a magnifying glass on the cracks in our system. I would say that I have seen that for journalism school as well. There are parts of journalism school where there were inequities that maybe we could look away from or problems with the way we were trying to teach that we didn't see or didn't really notice, and when the shutdown happened in the spring, we could not see those things anymore. We've had to completely reimagine how we're going to teach from a distance.

I want to talk a little bit about that in addition to the research that you mentioned that I did with Susan. Susan Harada, who is at Carleton, and I, we'd already been doing some research on newsroom values and news values and how those were being shifted in journalism schools. In the spring we decided, okay, we've all had to emergency move online, what are our instructors doing and what are they finding with that move? If anyone's interested in seeing that research in more depth, there actually is the PDF of some of the slides in the additional documents, but I'm just going to highlight a few of those things. And I'm going to tell you about what I've seen since we got the data and what I've found in my own teaching.

There are three things I'd like to mention. One is when this shutdown happened, there was a really negative impact on students and their access to technology. Students are used to being able to go to labs, they're used to being able to get cameras, audio equipment and studio time whenever they need to, and suddenly they didn't have that access. For some students that was great. They were able to pivot and use their phones. They were very flexible. They probably learned a lot about what it's like when you're working out in a news field and your gear stops working and you have to improvise. But for some students that was very negative. I have some examples from my own students. I had one student who didn't have a very good computer, only got access to the internet through cafes and at the school. And when all of those things were shut down, he couldn't do his work anymore.

We as instructors, we were very flexible with that. How can we support you? How can we get you what you need? Which is not necessarily the way we would always be, but I didn't know that this student had those challenges because he was able to hide it in the background. Whereas when the pandemic came along, he couldn't hide anymore. And so we saw that through our research, the survey respondents said that that's what they were finding, that most students lost all the access to technology supports and that was very difficult for them.

We also found that the course expectations for instructors really changed over that quick emergency time. There are certain things in journalism school that you always have to do. You cannot interview your mom, you can't interview your roommates, you have to interview real people, you have to go there yourself, you have to talk to them and put the mic in their face and have that discomfort. And suddenly, students couldn't do that. Maybe you were locked down completely and you couldn't leave your house. So, what are you going to do now? Actually, it's okay if you interview your roommate or your mom, or you attend a city council meeting online, which by the way, that's all the news journalists are doing anyway.

We changed our expectations and the things that were hard and fast rules, absolutely you cannot do it any other way, suddenly became very flexible. I wonder, and I'll talk about this a little later, if it's flexible in the course of a pandemic, why is it not flexible at any other time? We had talked about that a bit in our research.

Then the other piece from this is we knew from the instructors and from my own experience, we had taken away the technology, we've had become very flexible around what an assignment looked like, but at the same time, the quality of the work declined. When you think about that, we're going to dig into that a little bit more as we go through our research in the future, but when you think about that, I have

some thoughts. One of them is I think the quality of everyone's work in March and April declined. Maybe it's okay to expect that students would also have that reaction. The takeaways that we got from the research when we asked the instructors to think about it was, well, maybe we should be more flexible. Maybe we can have a wider range of the kinds of technology and the kinds of things that we will accept.

If we want to have our classroom keep pace with the newsroom, well, the newsrooms are doing it differently now. What can we look at and what are the realities on the ground and how are those reflected in the way we're teaching? I would say for myself, this idea of the quality declining, I have not seen that decline in my students. I saw a decline for sure in the spring, but this term we're teaching online. We've had a lot of time to think about it and a lot of time to address some of the problems that we knew were going to happen from having to do it online.

I would also say that in my own personal experience, I've been much more thoughtful about how to scaffold the skills, how to give them the material that they need in advance, how to make sure they get to practice a lot before they actually have to do it, because we have this distance between us, and you have to build in that extra flexibility.

I've also really tried to take a lot of the stress out of it. We heard in our research and I'm sure that many instructors could say the same thing, some students just dropped, we didn't see them. We would find out that maybe a student who seemed to be doing very well, had a very insecure home environment, or they had extra stressors that we just weren't aware of. When you look at that, you have to take the stress of the pandemic and the stress of learning new tools online out of it. I just want to talk about that for a moment when we look forward to the future, and I'd be interested to hear from my other panellists on this, but why is journalism school so stressful?

I was teaching my class this morning and I said, "Okay, how are you guys all doing?" And they're like, "Oh my gosh, we're so stressed out. Everything is crazy, too many assignments. We're learning 50 tools. We're not learning journalism," and it's always been that way. It was that way when I went to journalism school. We're trying to make it so that you know what to do when you get into a very stressful newsroom by making you exceptionally stressed out before you get there. And when we see what's happening, the world is very stressful right now, we know all of the things that are going on. I wonder, couldn't we design it in a way that makes it more supportive and kinder? So that when the students actually get into the newsroom, they've been able to learn those skills in a way that it's not so stressful.

I also see, to go back to what Dr. Theresa Tam was saying yesterday, one of the things she said was that as journalists, being good communicators, we can save lives. That's actually what we're being taught to do in journalism school is to give people information to save lives. Then, don't we want students to stick with us and to stay in journalism school and to not feel so stressed out that they do other things? I will just say one other thing about that.

The pandemic stripped away so many of the protective layers that students have. If you have a fight with your partner and your partner is sitting beside you while you're learning in class, that's very challenging. I think that we need to be aware of that as

we move forward. As we move forward, I think that this is just such an incredibly optimistic moment to build back, to move forward and say, “Those things didn’t work before, they don’t work during a pandemic, so maybe we can create something that works better for everyone after.” Again, if you want to see the actual numbers, you can look in the documents. I’ve tried to keep my optimism and I’ve tried to learn new things as we’re moving through this, and I really look forward to hearing what my other two panellists think about all of those things. And keeping your enthusiasm up.

Allan Thompson: Thank you very much, Jennifer. And obviously, I’m not a very good television producer, or I would’ve noticed this note earlier that, I think your papers were rubbing against your microphone, but that’s okay.

Jennifer Leask: I’m so sorry.

Allan Thompson: That’s all right. It only happened a couple of times. Karen, why don’t you jump in?

Karen Fowler-Watt: I think there’s a natural segue into what I’m going to talk about, and we’ve got some shared experience, but clearly I’m bringing a predominantly UK perspective to what I’m going to share today. I’ve sort of called this Reflections on the Shifting Shape of Journalism Education in the Covid-19 Pandemic, because I think I’m talking here on behalf of the group of colleagues who’ve done a bit of thinking and reflecting on these things.

I think we just want to take stock, of the experience of living in a story that we were reporting on. And, you know, journalists usually report on crisis, but the pandemic places journalists in that crisis like everyone else, and this unique experience presents us with challenges, which Jennifer has definitely talked about. I will touch on a couple that are similar.

I thought I’d start by giving a little bit of context and then move into what our reflections were, and then how we’ve mapped those onto a sort of pedagogic design for this academic year post-lockdown as we are currently in the United Kingdom. The spark for the reflections that I’m sharing with you today came from the reflections of a BBC journalist, medical editor, Fergus Walsh, who, wearing full PPE, reported from the frontline of intensive care units in hospitals in London in the heart of the pandemic in March, April, over here.

He’s a seasoned journalist, and he said that he had never been touched so much by a story like this one or affected so profoundly. That really made us think about what our students, who we were teaching to be journalists, living in this crisis must be going through if someone of veteran status was talking very openly and writing about the trauma that he had experienced as a result of reporting on the pandemic.

Just a little bit of context from the HE environment over here in the United Kingdom. Lockdown here started on the 16th of March for the whole country. Within universities, we were just a few weeks away from what you would call spring break. In my university, all teaching immediately moved online. We taught until the end of that month online, then we took a three-week break, and then we came back and returned to complete our teaching through April and May. The reflections that I’m going to share with you are from that period.

Within our Centre of Excellence in Media Practice at Bournemouth University, I lead the journalism education research group, which is a small group of colleagues all with practitioner backgrounds. We are all former journalists. I'm a former BBC journalist. As a collective, we aim to embrace a wide group of influencers and voices within the changing landscape of journalism practice. We stand for re-imagining and rethinking through listening, which we hope to make timely interventions in debate, but we're very interested in the human side of journalism practice. That's what brings us together. And there's nothing like a pandemic to make us think about these things.

This underpins pedagogic practices with a strong emphasis on community, on voice, on empathy and on self-reflection, and the pandemic drew this into really sharp focus, as I've said. I'm just going to share with you the essence of our series of reflective essays that we published this summer, and we hope to work it into a longer paper. This was just as lockdown in the United Kingdom was easing, and we are now just at a point where parts of the country are going back into what we call tier three lockdown. I'll then place those reflections into the framework of pedagogic theory, which indicates where we plan to take the initial reflections and where we have taken some of them this year.

In terms of collecting more data, we want to get narrative interviews from students and colleagues that articulate their lived experiences because we think it's important for the educators to have their voice as well as those of the students in this.

We reflected on the impact of five different areas of our practice as educators. Journalism's normative values was the key one for us, founded on the principle of impartiality, as Jennifer referred to. These things went out of the window with the pandemic. Suddenly we were thrown into our own stories, living in this story, and having to interview people close to us in order to get stories.

The second was teaching industry accredited skills. We have a project which is training community reporters funded by Facebook. They are not always people who've gone to university, but they are being trained to take their NCTJ, their National Council for the Training of Journalists diploma, and accredited skills diploma here in the United Kingdom. We have a group of those people from all around the country who we were suddenly teaching online. The whole point of their work is that they're out in the community reporting, but those communities suddenly became their bedrooms. That was a real challenge.

The third reflection for us was around original storytelling. How do we keep things original while we're part of the story? Squaring again with that objectivity shibboleth that we have as journalists. The false reflection was around teaching final year undergraduate students for a module. This is my own particular contribution to the paper with a focus on marginalized voices. Also, the students' own professional developing sense of identity as practitioners. These things again, were thrown into a very shifting shape as the pandemic struck.

Finally, managing student well-being across all levels. That would include our cohort of international postgraduate students, many of whom had to get back home and trying to complete really complex investigative journalism assignments. This made us start to think about what we've come to call a pedagogy of compassion and care.

First of all, I want to talk about how we responded at very short notice to these challenges, then to look at how the reflections are mapping onto our pedagogic response this academic year. We embrace the subjectivity, just as Jennifer talked about doing, the fact we're living in the story. An example of this was mobile survival videos, which first year students produced with their phones when they were allowed to interview their families, which we don't normally allow. Actually, we saw mainstream news organizations doing that in this country, holding long boom mics under aunties' windows, and talking to them and doing features about their own families. They didn't have the access to the campus newsrooms, as we've already heard, they couldn't get down into town. Everything had changed.

We asked them to stay at home and create short pieces about their households. And they came up with amazing products. Stories ranged from one student's social care and mother providing end-of-life support via video chat. Another was a student's interview with her mother who's a cake decorator who was facing the fear of 12 months without any income. These stories had validity because they were part of the fabric of everything that we're experiencing through the pandemic.

Turning now to the community aspect. Facebook reporters are looking for new ways of building community from literally from their bedrooms. I've interviewed a few of them over the past week to see how they're doing and if they're nine months into doing the same. We shifted the focus there to thinking about context building and how you can source stories without getting out and how you can build resilience, because these are young people who've never had to deal necessarily with grief and loss.

We noted as well that they were quite sensitive to feedback. Normally we would do quite professional sort of hard-nosed feedback, but we had to change the tone of what we were saying to the students while upholding standards because they were taking the feedback differently. We weren't shoulder-to-shoulder with them, face-to-face talking about these things. The daily diet of news in that patch was causing them some trouble as well. We had to counsel them around that.

While we focus quite a lot on what students are becoming within J schools, the focus shifted to this idea of belonging and managing well-being. I think we've concluded that becoming has to wait a little and we have to think a lot now about belonging, well-being being all about identity and what am I at this moment in time? When we do look at becoming and discussions on identity, these focused on resilience, trauma training, questioning journalistic authority in the context of crisis and thinking about whose voices were heard.

Then when thinking about inclusivity, some students or journalists themselves are marginalized. Within my own module, this was a theme of some of their presentations. The idea that journalists, even though in this country they will make key workers, were actually on the margins of their craft. Through offering their own professional perspectives and articulating confidence in the power of their own voices, they became determined to advocate for marginalized people and avoid stigma and stereotyping in their storytelling. This, I think, is a real positive that I'm taking away from the experience of teaching through the pandemic.

The final section of this is the international students who really did feel very anxious, quite lost. One said, “I’m really struggling. The added complication of working from home with the ghost of COVID hanging around.” Another had a career as a mother who had to think about living with frontline health workers and the risk factor of that. This prompted a really pragmatic response from us in terms of the complexities of the investigative journalism project that those students were working on. We focused on care and getting through and training them in flexibility, something Jennifer also referred to, and pragmatic responses to crises really.

These responses shaped our reflections and the design of our teaching, as I’ve said. If I could just go through this the first reflection was this pandemic is a catalyst. It enables us really to redraw the boundaries of the journalistic field. And our pedagogic response to that was training for mobile video, new approaches to storytelling, and teaching through the screen, using a lot of asynchronous material, not always doing things live and in real-time for them, so they could engage with it at a time that was suitable for them.

Our second reflection was that focus on community that I talked about, and this renewed focus on community, which was very big in the United Kingdom, clapping for careers and so on. The pedagogic response to that was a focus on sources, building contacts from the ground up, this idea of dynamic practices, as pedagogic theory would refer to it.

The third reflection was on the tensions between upholding professional standards and the reception of feedback, and assessment design and feedback mechanisms, which need clarity and consistency of tone. Then, well-being moved to centre stage, that was our next reflection. Our response to that was that belonging is imperative, becoming can wait, as I’ve already indicated. Looking for social and pastoral spaces online where we could show a shared empathy and also where hierarchies were flattened. We focused a lot on community building with the students in order to focus on issues around well-being.

And then there is that spotlight on marginalized voices in journalism practice. I wonder whether, if the pandemic marks this sort of epiphany, which leaves a mark on all our lives. I wonder whether graduating students’ self-stories, this idea that they were very much thinking about their own identity in the world that they’re going out into perhaps more than ever, will shape their future journalistic practice in a way that is more empathetic, focused on listening and critically aware of others. I really got a sense of that developing within the students and actually my colleagues as well. Our response has been to co-create spaces for discussion and exploration to shape our journalistic selves, and to collaborate more to bring them into the design of what we’re doing and to make things more dialogic rather than tanning, and that old apprentice model, which can sometimes be very much a play in J schools.

The final reflection is compassion as a pedagogical principle. The way we’ve responded to this in terms of designing our teaching, which is still online, I’m still teaching online currently, is a flexible design, pragmatic responses and being realistic, while retaining quality and again, thinking about making it student focused. Sometimes making things less complex as well, which doesn’t necessarily mean your learning stance has to do that, but you can have a lot of formative feedback.

Everything doesn't have to be assessed. Then the assessment perhaps comes a little later to make things less complex.

To conclude, I would say a powerful emergent theme from our reflections was that community and global outlook and an emphasis on making sure students are employable is really important, but that sense of community and global outlook was actually absolutely crucial. Perhaps more importantly, an emphasis on commitment to community and global perspective.

A number of students I've spoken to are now working as community reporters in the pandemic, and they've commented on how they see journalism as a force for good; how they feel the human aspects of journalism have become important in the pandemic. And I feel that too, for us as educators. The series of reflections, for me illustrates how our collective interest as a group in the journalism education research group over here, our collective interest in the human side of journalism has really been placed under a very bright spotlight through this pandemic. The move into a digital space has encouraged new ways of thinking about community, voice, empathy, about our practice as journalists and as educators. Many of the industry standards are shifting due to this new normal of social distancing, and we see a pedagogy of compassion emerging from our pragmatic responses to crisis while also seeking salience in the stories of others, even when we are part of that story.

Allan Thompson: Great. Okay. Lots to talk about, but let's first go to Maryn and then we'll come back and tie all three of these together.

Maryn McKenna: Thank you. These are just fascinating discussions. I'm enjoying listening to them so much. I'm thrilled to be joining this conference and to be on this panel. I particularly appreciate being invited. So, thanks Allan Thompson, and thanks Carleton. I am a university journalism instructor right now. I teach health writing and co-teach health podcasting in the Center for the Study of Human Health at Emory University, but what I'm going to talk about is not actually about my experience at Emory, which is slightly different from what's been discussed, because Emory doesn't actually have a journalism department anymore. I'm bringing journalistic technique and rigor into a space that doesn't have a lot of journalism education. What I'm going to talk about instead is creating journalistic education around the pandemic on the fly.

In May, I was the creator and the chief instructor for a massive open online course that was called Journalism in a Pandemic: Covering COVID-19 Now and in the Future. It was the brainchild of Rosental Alves, who's the Director of the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas, at the University of Texas. The Knight Center is a foundation-funded organization that is perpetually engaged in mounting massive open online courses that are mostly peer-to-peer journalism education.

What that usually means is that the courses are programmed by senior journalists and taken by junior ones, in subjects as diverse as data journalism and disinformation and online harassment. There's one beginning on Monday on digital audio storytelling. Courses are free. They're always entirely non-synchronous, and the centre has a commitment to delivering them in multiple languages.

In mid-March, Rosental came to me and said that their community of 200,000 existing students was expressing to them that they were about to need help

navigating what they thought was coming. At the point at which we were having this conversation, the coronavirus epidemic was only about two months old, maybe three months old. The World Health Organization had declared a global pandemic exactly seven days before.

The Knight Center was pretty prescient in their concerns, and I suddenly had a great deal of work to do. The usual pattern of the Knight Center courses is to have the senior journalist instructor draw content from their own professional experience. That is mostly delivered in video modules, sometimes with additional materials or workbooks, learnings tested by quizzes, which are delivered at the end of each module. This is backed up by a fairly low-tech, deliberately low-tech bulletin board space where engagement is driven by discussion questions.

To incentivize people to stick with the course and complete all the modules participants can apply to receive a certificate from the Knight Center afterward. Looking at their prototype, I realized fairly quickly that though I've been an infectious disease journalist all of my career, and I have an extremely wide network, there were things that I did not know going into the pandemic that I would also need to learn so I wouldn't be responsible to follow their traditional pattern of teaching only out of my own personal experience.

The structure I proposed to them was that for each module, we'd present a video lecture from me, a Q and A between me and some subject matter experts, such as an epidemiologist or a disinformation expert, and then a second Q and A between myself and another journalist who was already covering the pandemic to deliver an additional dose of peer-to-peer learning. We finalized the syllabus approximately 12 days after they made their first approach to me. We released a video promo one week later, and we began producing content to launch the course at the beginning of May.

And just to make this even harder on ourselves, the Knight Center determined that all of the course materials would be delivered simultaneously in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. I do not speak two of those languages. In order to maximize learning and speed, the centre hired three additional instructors who not only translated my materials, but also maintained student communities in each of those languages.

I have to say that all of this would have been impossible without the Knight Center's technical adviser whose name is Ryan Cigar, who managed the post-production of all the video content, including the translations of the closed captioning. It also could not have taken place without funding from the World Health Organization, UNESCO and the UN Development Program, who provided funding, especially for the non-English portions and had a particular interest in health disinformation.

We opened the course on the 4th of May, and discovered that we had attracted almost 9,000 students, which was a record for the centre, from 161 countries, which means we had attracted participation from most of the nations of the world. The range of experience of the journalists who participated was incredibly wide, from people who were already science or health reporters, but felt they needed a brush-up because they sensed what was coming, to people who normally covered education, sports or policing or were the lone general assignment reporter in their area.

Suddenly they had to become pandemic reporters because as we've all experienced since the spring, the pandemic has been the only story there is. Sports is a pandemic story now, education is, policing is, even home design and gardening are seen through the lens of the pandemic as we all lockdown and stay at home.

Because we crashed the development of the course, I can't say for sure that we went into it with a sense of best practices for distance learning, but what we worked out were strategies and tactics that I think have since been confirmed by the experience of many people who suddenly began teaching online and certainly by my own experience because I'm teaching remotely now. Some of those practical practices are that asynchronous segments should always be short. I think none of mine were over 15 minutes and they often were as low as 10 minutes.

What we think of as a traditional lecture, one to many, is pointless online. Most of my video segments were phrased and staged instead as a very personal conversation between myself and all of those students that when slides or graphic content are used, I featured some simple lists and some still and video photography. They should always be available separately offline. I should, of course, include other non-synchronous content, which for us was curated pieces of journalism and background readings and reports by governments and NGOs.

I'm very proud of all the content we provided, but I think the greatest part of the learning that occurred in the course was actually among the attendees themselves in the gathering space that we offered them where the conversation was prompted by weekly quizzes and driven by discussion questions, and also in a Facebook group, which is still active now, five months after the course ended. There were many students in the developing world where most of their communication is on mobile, not on laptops or desktops, and they have set up a Telegram group and I believe a WhatsApp group as well, that are also still going.

What else did we learn? We learned that good video production is important, particularly excellent sound quality, but that the visual portion of video segments don't have to be Bollywood or Hollywood polished. We learned that it's essential to plan for students accessing material on mobile, and particularly for the challenges of low bandwidth. It was necessary sometimes to post very simplified versions of materials. For instance, copying a website into a PDF and stripping out everything except the text. We learned that streaming can stress bandwidth also, therefore the transcripts of videos were always crucial.

On the upside, we learned that one of the benefits of distance learning for journalism is that it can allow students to have access to experts that they would never have been able to interview on their own. My lone student in Nepal probably would not have gotten his email returned by the World Health Organization's chief epidemiologist, but by participating in the course, he was able at least to participate remotely and to watch an interview that I did with that scientist. In addition, Rosental had asked me to leverage my network. So, among the other people whom the students got to learn from, were the immediate past director of the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the head of vaccine research at Merck.

I think the single biggest lesson for me, and this is one that I am learning again with my current students, is that we have to be prepared to trust remote students

to manage their learning themselves. Much of the benefit of the Knight MOOCs was that it allowed participants from all different countries, all different political systems, all different degrees of sophistication of public health to speak very candidly, not just about their reporting experience, but also about the experience of living in their societies at this moment, experiencing the pandemic alongside everyone who's not a journalist.

I've been inspired by that to work with my current students now. As I'm teaching remotely, I noticed that when I deliberately program times and spaces for them to speak to each other without my being present and dominating the conversation except possibly lurking in their breakout rooms without my video on, that's when they have the most engagement. I think looking at how our semester is going, it has the greatest chance of success. That's what our experience was.

I'd just like to mention that though the live MOOCs ended on the 31st of May, the material all lives on at the Knight Center site as a completely self-directed course. The link will be available through this symposium's materials. It is still free. It is entirely asynchronous, of course. It is now available in addition to the four original languages in Russian, Arabic and I believe Chinese is coming. Because anyone can take the course, the Facebook group remains open. As soon as people take it, they are eligible for participation in that now, multiple thousand community of journalists worldwide. That's my report on what it was like to crash journalism education in a pandemic. Thank you very much for listening.

Allan Thompson:

Great. Thank you. We called this conference Journalism in the Time of Crisis for a reason. I specifically didn't call it the more obvious journalism and the pandemic, even though it is about the intersection of journalism and the pandemic, but my hope is that we're going to draw lessons from this that we can take forward. The more I listen to you, I wonder are some of the things we're learning, things that were already starting, that were already in the back of our minds before the pandemic about teaching and the way to teach and approaches, but it's the pandemic, it's the crisis that has brought us to this point where we have to adapt, we have to change what we're doing, we have no choice. Suddenly we're in this position where we do have to change. So how are we going to do it?

The session just before this one earlier this afternoon, I was struck by something Marjorie Rouse from Internews said, "A crisis is a horrible thing to waste." It's upon us, and we've got to make the most of it. Part of this discussion is about how do we make the most of the period that we are in? We are forced to teach online for the foreseeable future, the rest of this academic year for most people, potentially into the next, who knows? Is this kind of our new normal? This sharing of what we're doing now and what works, but also I would like to look at, assuming there is a post-pandemic, what are the things that we're just not going to go back to? What will have changed forever? And what will be the new normal?

What we're doing now, we had a good conversation a month or so ago with several newsroom managers and we were asking them what should we be doing now in this period in the classroom? What do you think would serve our students as they head out into the workforce? And they said, "This is an amazing time for them to be studying journalism in this environment, being forced to work online, because

this will turn out people who are innovative, mobile, can work on their own, can deal with isolation,” but then it gets a bit self-serving, we don’t need a big expensive newsroom, maybe news organizations like this shift to people working on their own in an isolation.

I wonder what you think about that immediate transition? Are we training a new generation of mobile, independent, innovative, self-reliant journalists? Jump in anyone, or maybe Karen, you were nodding a moment ago.

Karen Fowler-Watt: I would agree. That point about the pandemic as a catalyst, I think it has enabled us to do some things we were thinking about possibly doing, and that is reflected in the industry as well. I agree with you, there are also some nefarious things that people perhaps wanted to do, which aren’t so great around cutting overheads and cutting resources, but I think there’s a balance to be struck between the resilience and the opportunity, which is always awful to think perhaps of opportunity within some crisis, but there is an opportunity for young journalists and many of are making the most of it.

As well, we have to think a lot about the effect of what they’re doing is having on them, and building not only, resilience is a word that is okay, I think, but resourcefulness and really being able to strike a balance in their own lives. Certainly some, you know, we’re talking here about people who are perhaps 20 years old doing the sort of work that they would never have been doing at this stage in their lives in their careers, and they are missing out on the mentoring and the water cooler chat and all of those things that I think are the moments of serendipity that come from being within a physical space, as they go out on placement, as students, or if they’re working as apprentices as the community reporters I’m talking about are.

We have to be very careful about being gung-ho about that opportunity and handling it with great care. Hence this idea of the notion of care and compassion on our part as educators, but also I think from within news organizations, it’s going to be crucial.

I will just say one other thing, having talked to some news organizations myself as well. I think there’s a lot of anxiety and worry and concern among people who are seasoned professionals. I indicated this in my little spiel at the beginning. Perhaps that will be changed across the board and the hierarchies will flatten across the board as well. I think that’s yet to be seen.

Allan Thompson: I would commend to you the study that Julie Pezzetti released this morning at the conference. It is incredible, really the first major survey of journalists during the pandemic and the overwhelmingly grim, grave picture of the way journalists who have been covering the pandemic are feeling, their sense of stress and anxiety and concern about their jobs and worry about their health, it was quite overwhelming.

Karen Fowler-Watt: I agree. It’s a fantastic service with the town centres as well. It’s a brilliant piece of work. It was wonderful that you had that in the conference. I thought it was really important.

Allan Thompson: Jen, what do you think about the time we’re in and what we’re doing to get through this and how is it serving our students?

- Jennifer Leask:** As I said before, I try to be an optimist, but I definitely hear what you're saying Karen. I don't want to be an optimist to the point of pretending like nothing bad is happening. It's more that, from my perspective, there were things for me that weren't working as a teacher. I've only been teaching for about five years. I had thought, "Okay, well, this is the thing that you do when you do it this way, because this is the way it's always been done," or the stressful newsroom, you know the way that that climate works.
- So, I have that sense of it. Then you think that doesn't really work that well in this case. So, one of the things I've been thinking about quite a lot is this idea of building community. I have started a new job at UBC this year, but we can't go to campus. I know some of the people who work there, because I've met them before, but there are moments where I might pop my head in somebody's office and say, "Hey, do you have a second? I want to introduce myself. I want to chat. I want to have the water cooler moment." And so I'm very empathetic to students who now are part of this community, but they've never seen anybody in real life, and they have to make an appointment to meet their classmates and they can't just say, "Oh my gosh, isn't that crazy? Or isn't this happening?" How do we build those communities? I think that's part of building resiliency.
- I also think there are some opportunities. There's not a lot of journalism learning online for lots of reasons, there's not a lot of master's programs or distanced journalism programs or some MOOCs, but it's not something that people could do. One of the things we were looking at in our school is there are a lot of people who already live in small communities and they want to be journalists, but they don't necessarily want to move to a place like Vancouver, where it's very expensive for two years to do journalism training, but the people who live in Vancouver don't necessarily want to move to a community that has 5,000 people in it to be journalists.
- I see this as an opportunity where we can figure out how to do that training really well. Then suddenly this sense of community and building those skills could mean that we are building a more robust, small community news network, because maybe you could connect those communities through that network. I think right now we're trying to get through it, but a lot of the things we can do to build a more equitable journalism school or to build a better distance journalism school will actually serve to make journalism as a whole stronger and more robust down the road.
- Allan Thompson:** Maryn, you've been doing this with thousands of people at a time, right? Exclusively online. So, are you just way ahead of us?
- Maryn McKenna:** I don't think so, but so much of what all of you just said has resonated with me. I was profoundly struck, Karen, when you said a pedagogy of compassion, because that to me just seems so essential to what we're doing right now. Just to underline, I am not teaching a journalism program. My students are probably, I think for the most part, not going to become professional journalists, but we hope that they will take the skills and rigour of journalism into working for their pre-med and pre-public health if they're going to go work for international NGOs and places like that. We want to imbue them with journalism values in addition to writing skills.
- They are so stressed, they're so overworked. And I am sympathetic to that because I am myself. In addition to being a part-time professor, I am a full-time working

journalist. I don't think I've left my desk before midnight since February. I have tried in real-time this semester to figure out what are the core things that they most need to learn and what can I let go of as Jennifer has been saying.

In the before time, I have to say, I would have been punitive about missing deadlines, and now they tell me they can't get their interviews because it takes four tries to get someone to answer their email, and I kind of quietly zeroed out the punitive deadline portion of the syllabus for the rest of the semester.

The things that I hope they are taking away will be the degree to which, as you're both saying, journalism can be a community, even a distance community. As I said in my remarks, I noticed when they are completely transformed, when I program in opportunities to get them to talk to each other, to talk out their work to each other, they come alive, they are engaged, they are obviously more interested in what we're doing. I am hopeful we can find more ways to stimulate that response and discard all of the ways in which we were suppressing their creativity and boring them. I feel like I'm still groping my way to exactly how we do that though.

Allan Thompson: But that is something I really wonder about though is creating that gathering space, the place where they can meet virtually. We've all just spent the last two days on Zoom in the course of this conference. There seems to be a lot of conformity around the platforms and the tools that we're going to use. Are there spaces or tools or techniques that we haven't thought of that would work better to create that kind of community or environment when people cannot be physically present with each other? Jump in anyone.

Jennifer Leask: I was going to say that I have been looking at various tools. I definitely agree with Maryn. When my students have an opportunity to be in a breakout room, and I do lurk, and then they notice me, they are surprised. But when they have an opportunity to be in a breakout room, it's like they're working in a group in a classroom. They feel a lot more comfortable experimenting with some of the material that we're teaching. I think generally that works better than discussion posts because I find with discussion posts it's more formal and they're scared to be criticized because it's in print and will be seen there for a long time.

One of the things you mentioned about tools and one of the pieces of information I'm getting from my students is that instructors went away for the summer, and we all learned new tools. Then we came in and the students are taking five classes, and each instructor has a different way that they want them to interact. One class is Slack and one class is Padlet, and then we've got discourse and we've got all these other things. They're spending so much time learning those tools that they're not learning the journalism. They've been told to go in so many places that they can't keep them straight.

I think it's amazing that we have all these tools, but I feel like we might need to, at least each program might need to coalesce around one or two of them so that it doesn't become about learning the tool, it becomes about the community.

Allan Thompson: Karen.

Karen Fowler-Watt: Yes, I'm worried about that as well. We had these conversations over the summer, that overload of all the whizzy things. We were doing all these workshops. The research centre does a lot of work with online teaching and has done for years. Actually, as you know Jen, because our doctorate is online, but it's very different when you're talking to big groups or large groups of undergraduate students. So we did have a bit of a conversation about just keeping it as calm as we could. That's why I'm really interested in the themes that come out of this, and whether there's that idea of simplifying without lowering standards, to Maryn's point about, okay, if the deadline is not such a thing, what is?

I do think as an optimistic sort of point that there is a lot that they are taking away and learning that might have been subliminal or something they reflected on post-graduation that now is quite central to their experience, as long as we do not overload them with the technology. The sorts of things I was talking about, I do think are there. They're thinking in that way, they're thinking in different ways potentially. And my experience is that they are engaging in big groups, as well as in breakout rooms. They're desperate to have the connection because life is quite simple for them outside. There's not a lot going on. The pubs close here at 10 o'clock at night, you can't do a lot. So, you might as well be meeting in those communal spaces online, but I think simplicity is key. Absolutely.

Allan Thompson: When you talk about the things that we now realize we need to change because of the crisis that we're in, I do wonder... as Carleton's journalism school is celebrating its 75th anniversary, right? That's part of the reason we're holding this conference, but does that mean we've been doing this wrong for 70 some years? Because I know, I've been here 18 years, and before that I was a reporter at *The Toronto Star*. I think some of my learning on the job, my remote learning as a reporter, probably came from an editor on the phone in Toronto shouting at me, "What's this lead? You're not a typist, you're a journalist. We don't pay at a type."

And even pedagogically in journalism school, until very, very recently we were actually trying to create a stressful environment, not to mitigate the stress, the pedagogy of compassion was a concept that we were literally creating a test tube to impose stress upon students with deadlines and with these demands that have to be met, or you might get an F or a deduction in your grade. So, has this just made us realize that maybe we've got to shift away from that model? This is not just something that we're having to adapt because of the pandemic. That maybe that model didn't work. Is that what you were suggesting, Karen? Is that the move to the pedagogy of compassion?

Karen Fowler-Watt: Yes. And I think I've always had an interest in sort of participatory websites, such as Global Voices and the work that they do. We do a lot of work with the Salzburg Academy for Media and Global Change. And the sort of thinking, the talking and the discursive nature, the dialogic nature of teaching, within those environments and the sorts of things that have been going on in your MOOC with such large numbers of people, I do think that could be front and centre of what's going on within J schools.

There is a tension though, where we have accrediting bodies here just as you have accreditation in the United States and in Canada, I believe. There's always

that tension where we're always having to try to lead the change from within the J schools, but I think the key is not to be turning out another generation of journalists who are just the same, because that just isn't going to work. And in that sense, the pandemic really is a catalyst. I think what you're doing within your MOOC is really exciting, particularly with people who may not even end up being journalists. You know, there's a lot to be said for those transferable skills as well.

Maryn McKenna: You know, I think a lot about this question that you've all raised of what this moment is teaching us and what is it showing us? We can sacrifice. Because like you, Allan, I was trained in the kind of city room environment where your editor yelled at you across the room and through staplers if you didn't respond fast enough and ripped copy out of your hands or something like that. And looking back, I mean, it's certainly made me an extremely precise reporter. I never had cause to question again things that I was made to look up in the stylebook. I had them practically tattooed on my skin, but how much of that, now that I look back, how much of that was abusive and not actually useful? Did it actually create better journalism? It made me a journalist of the last quarter of the twentieth century, because that's the way we made journalists then, but did it actually make my product better? I'm not sure.

This question of how do we respond to this moment and be compassionate to our students but not be soft on them and not reduce our standards? I think we're all aware of the problem and of the potential for growth, but deeply aware of the dangers. And it doesn't sound like any of us have solved that yet.

Karen Fowler-Watt: Could I ask you a question, Maryn? I agree with you, I don't think we have got the solutions, I think these are all things we're tussling with, aren't they? And reflecting on and we're all in it ourselves, but do you think there's an element of changing practices? I'm thinking particularly about the way that students are now having to build a relationship with sources in a very different way in the first place. We know it's very difficult for them to even have the competence to perhaps pick up a phone, something we have to teach, but that's the way, the only way that they're really engaging with people.

Then, because of the nature of the stories they're covering quite often, they're learning very quickly you don't just smash and grab and go and take a story and then drop the person and take what you need for your quote, you build a relationship, you might need to go back to them. I just wonder whether longer term they are learning to be better journalists than those of us perhaps who were balled up by an overmighty news editor?

Maryn McKenna: And that's learning to be better human beings. I am a former fellow of the Dart Center at Columbia, the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma having been an infectious disease reporter, and an epidemics and disasters reporter my entire career. Their championing of how to conduct trauma-informed journalism to be sensitive to sources, to not take advantage of sources, to not re-traumatize people is something that I think about all the time these days, because in a way we are all doing trauma journalism now. And needing to be informed of the ways in which we do not re-traumatize the people we are interviewing or writing about is so critical.

So, to the degree that any of our students learn that as a result of this experience, I have to believe that they will be better journalists in addition to being better human beings.

Karen Fowler-Watt: I completely agree with that.

Allan Thompson: I have a couple of questions that have popped up on the question board here. One to all the panellists. What do you think about the new media mania? In Turkey, where I live and teach, the departments named New Media are opening under faculties of communication. He says he doesn't agree with that and wonders what you think. Anyone want to jump in?

Karen Fowler-Watt: I think it's a difficult one because you might just have different cultural takes on that. I mean, it's something that I would not have a problem with. We integrate new media into everything that we do within the department of communication, journalism, and the faculty of media and communications. I don't believe it's something to be concerned about, but I'm not sure where the concerns are coming from in terms of the question.

Allan Thompson: Okay. I do have another. From Alexander Javier. So, the question. I'm an undergraduate student at the University of Toronto pursuing a double major in economics and political science, currently in my fourth year. Would have been great if I could have taken my second major or minor in a journalism program. Could universities create some sort of agreement between each other to incorporate an online journalism program?

And Jen you were kind of alluding to this, but in a slightly different way, about reaching remote communities where people might not otherwise be able to pursue a career in journalism, but in this case someone who's pursuing another discipline, but would like to look at doing journalism online.

Jennifer Leask: Well, I don't know if that is what's going to come out of this, but I think that there aren't a lot of opportunities to do journalism programs online, at least in Canada. I can think of the journalism schools we have here, and I don't think that they offer that, unless you're registered as a journalism student. There's not a sort of Athabasca University or a master's degree of journalism for lots of reasons, because it was not considered easy to teach journalism online for all sorts of hands-on technical reasons.

So, I wonder if now we're working towards getting around those things because we're forced into doing online teaching of journalism, what is to stop someone's school from putting together an actual way that students like that at the UofT, who's not in a journalism school to do that? There's lots of journalism part-time studies programs. Why is there not an online part-time studies program? Because if we're figuring out these pieces, could we not figure them out just to get away from those logistical problems that people come into contact with when they're trying to learn journalism? So, maybe you don't want to move, or maybe you want to do it part-time. If we are able to figure it out for now, I wonder if we can figure it out for the future.

Allan Thompson: I wonder the same. I mean, some of the inequities of who gets to study journalism in a university context, you can't do that if you're in a remote community that you're not able to leave or that you don't want to leave, or it's very difficult to do that. For

example, if it means you have to move across continents to take the program that you want to take. Right now we have a number of international students who are doing our program from their family homes. They may have been in Canada and gone back for the pandemic.

We have 14 students working on the publication, documenting this conference. Two of them are international. One is doing a podcast about the conference from her family home in Dubai, and the other is covering the event from New Delhi. And they're both doing a great job. So, it does make you wonder, I think, can we now do this? A year ago, if someone had said, "We will teach our entire curriculum online," we would have thought, "How would we ever do that?" Well, we are doing it. And I do wonder what the post-pandemic version of that will be. And presumably it's not just going back to doing everything the way we used to do it before.

Jennifer Leask: I think it's also the idea of removing barriers from learning journalism. There are quite a few barriers that have been put in place and sometimes that's a financial barrier. You've learned journalism, but you're going to go into communication. It's a geographical barrier. There's lots of reasons why students don't necessarily go through sometimes.

Where I live in Vancouver, it's incredibly expensive. So, students are working two jobs to live here, as well as doing journalism school. If we can remove some of those barriers, maybe we can have more journalism students and more journalists who want to stay in journalism. And in the end, that would be so much better for the industry as a whole. You could bolster that in lots of ways. I'm not presuming that I'm the one that's going to figure out how to launch journalism online at a university, but I'm excited to see how that's going to work out.

Allan Thompson: A couple of questions are popping in. Ellin Bessner, a professor at Centennial College in Toronto, your findings mirror a lot of what we're seeing. The important takeaway from your webinar has been compassion, trying to lower the stress of deadlines, which we are hearing from our students too. Wonder if you can discuss more about how you handle assignment story deadlines, because having deadlines helps students to juggle the requirements from all their other courses while also teaching them a key skill that newsrooms will need from them when they go out. How far do you bend on the deadlines?

Maryn McKenna: Is that for me? The funny thing is, just this morning I sent an announcement. We use the Canvas online platform at Emory, and so I sent an announcement to my students in Canvas saying, "Okay, kids, look, you may have noticed that I have been flexible about deadlines because the semester is a hellscape and I know you are stressed, but we are coming to the end of the semester. And therefore, we are going to run out of time to be flexible. So, as much as I allowed you to be flexible in the first part of the semester, the second half of the semester, we're actually in the last third, we are going to have to be tougher because you have to turn and work, and I have to give you a grade."

Part of what they've been reporting back to me, and remember these are not journalism students, so for most of them my course is the first time they've ever written a piece of popular writing or non-academic writing and the first time they've

ever conducted an interview. I understand that this is very much 101, and there were things that I might've done as a baby journalist that they have no acquaintanceship with at all.

But I know as someone who also is a working journalist, that it's taking me three and four times before sources respond to me now, and I am tough because I have done this a long time, so how can I expect the students to do this? How can I score them down if they email a potential source twice and can't get an interview out of that? It's just unrealistic. So, this is very much ad hoc, and I very much hope my chair is not listening, but for each of them because I fortunately have a relatively small class, I have 20 students, we work out individual plans for when they're going to hit lots of interstitial milestones. Somehow we get there, at least we've gotten there to this point. Would that be successful in a class of 100 students in journalism 101? Probably not. Fortunately, I don't have to teach that class. That's all very ad hoc for me.

Allan Thompson: Janice Neil, my counterpart colleague at Ryerson, she's responding to what we were saying a moment ago about having international students who can take our program. She says, "Yes, but it's easy to cover events from around the world when everything is conferences, online events, when everyone's covering things online. As we return to the world of face-to-face, won't we still privilege reporters doing first-hand observations?"

Maryn McKenna: But how much are we going to return to face-to-face? Granted I'm in the United States and our pandemic is worse than most of the rest of the world, but universities are all staying online for the spring, large corporations aren't going back to their offices until maybe sometime in the summer, who knows when restaurants in the United States are going to come back? It's very likely that major scientific conferences are going to stay online for the foreseeable future. So yes, I think I understand the point underneath the question, but I don't know how soon we are in fact going back to the option of doing journalism face-to-face. Though, again, this is US specific.

Allan Thompson: I do wonder if there's going to be a hybrid. Jen, jump in.

Jennifer Leask: I was going to say that I think that it will be a yes and when you look at the news, even before the pandemic, you saw way more Skype interviews, you saw far more interviews from afar. And now that has just been more integrated into the news. For teaching students what they need to do to work in a newsroom, is sometimes figure out a way to have a video interview that's going to be integrated into your story, but when you're doing a longer feature or you're doing an investigative piece, of course, you're still going to figure out a way to do that face-to-face. And we're figuring out a way to do that now by sitting very far apart and having your crew wear masks.

I think that we will go back to that, but we will also have the additional tool of doing distance interviews as a tool in the tool box, because that's what we're seeing in newsrooms. We need to train students to do what we will see there, but I don't want my students to not ever have the experience of sitting down and asking someone tough questions across a room from them. Because I think that's a really worthwhile and difficult skill to cultivate.

- Maryn McKenna:** I have a unit in a day when I'm teaching writing narrative where I talk about the importance of gathering and conveying sensory detail. Well, if they're not going to be in the same room with people, they won't know what it smells like or what their clothing looks like or what the surrounding is like. It's very difficult to figure out how to integrate that into how to write narrative in a time of pandemic.
- Allan Thompson:** You know, though increasingly I hear of people asking the source they're interviewing, "Would you mind just looking out the window and telling me what's going on? Can you just grab your phone and take some pictures of yourself and maybe go down the hall and do the cutaways." And so that's happening. Jen, Ivor Shapiro also at Ryerson says, "I agree with Jennifer. I wonder if J-Schools Canada could coordinate member schools' efforts in creating an online journalism program or international minor or something. Carleton, Ryerson, Kings, Mount Royal, and so on, many others could take their best online courses and make them available." What do you think of that idea?
- Jennifer Leask:** I think you should talk to some people at J-Schools Canada about that, which I guess I am now on the board of it, but I would take that to the meeting. I mean, there could be a collaboration. That could be something that we do where you could, maybe some of the programs that you're talking about, they could collaborate and maybe put something together. I think that's a possibility, but if people are willing to put in the time and the work.
- Allan Thompson:** There was another question here that's on the same theme, but it's maybe more pragmatic that this pedagogy of compassion. Right now at this moment we might mean well giving students a break when it comes time to calculate their grades at the end of this term. There are a lot of students who are just incredibly stressed out and their cumulative screen time, day by day can be eight, nine, 10, 12 hours in front of a screen. And it's a lot. And are we just going to have to cut them some slack during this time?
- Maryn McKenna:** No. At Emory, a lot of US institutions did this to different degrees, but at Emory we slid our semester forward three weeks. So, we began in the middle of August. We eliminated our fall break. And we're sending students home at American Thanksgiving. It's at the end of November. So, that means that they've had a sprint of 14 weeks with no break I have four more classes to go. They are exhausted, or I can just hear the sand in the gears of their brains.
- They tell me that they're on screens 10 hours a day. And most of my students are either in newly single dorm rooms, or they're in local apartments, but I have one in Ghana and one in Korea and one in China. Those three actually probably have a better chance of going out in the world than the ones in the United States do, sadly. They seem to be more tired because of all the screen time than they would I think if they even had this much class time and homework the way we did it in the before times.
- Allan Thompson:** Yes.
- Karen Fowler-Watt:** I was just going to say that one way perhaps of alleviating that stress is, and what we're trying to do, integrate more formative feedback and less of the summative

feedback, so everything doesn't carry a grade, but forwards into the final grade. So, there's that. It was really to the point you were making earlier about lifting deadlines, being a little more slack early on, maybe building portfolios, different techniques, so that it's not constant hand-in-hand in assessment, assessment, assessment. That seems to be working quite well, but we start later than you. We're a little earlier into our semester at the moment, we don't finish until mid-December. But I do think formative feedback is a really useful way of engaging students, supporting them, while not carrying a grade with it, which creates stress.

Allan Thompson: I just want to remind you and everyone watching if you have the time at seven o'clock, so after this session ends, we are having an open town hall for journalism students, which is a very informal session, not webinar format. Everyone will be there and can have their cameras on if they want to and have a chance to talk. So, that's coming up at seven o'clock after this session.

In the few minutes that we have left, I thought I might just ask each of you in the same sort of order as we started off, just to wrap up. What do you think is the most important lesson for journalism education that we take forward from this period?
Jen.

Jennifer Leask: I would say probably to be flexible with not only expectations, and I don't mean in the sense of lowering them but be flexible and responsive to whether it's what's happening in the newsroom, or what's happening in the world, or what's happening in the background with students. Like Maryn said, because you will allow people to be better humans and we want better humans to be the people in the newsrooms, by creating better journalism students, like a better atmosphere for journalism students, I think eventually over time we will create a better atmosphere for newsrooms and therefore the information that the public gets is going to be better. I think being flexible and understanding that will help moving forward.

Allan Thompson: Karen.

Karen Fowler-Watt: I agree with that. Obviously, it's very clear that I'm really interested in the human side of journalism and the idea of empathy, but I think perhaps to take away from this the sense of community that has been built and that people do understand that they can serve really very small areas really well with their journalism and their storytelling, and finding ways of doing that which are original, but also meaningful. I think we built a sort of mosaic of a great community journalism that could come out of this. I see some really great work going on at ground level with particularly young community reporters. I really hope that will continue to build, along with those notions of empathy and compassion that I talked about a lot today.

Allan Thompson: Thank you. Maryn.

Maryn McKenna: I feel like I haven't got anything to say that hasn't already been said. This question of how do we bring in flexibility? How do we actually enshrine compassion as a value of journalism management? It was so foreign to the way we ran newsrooms for so long, certainly every newsroom I ever worked in. The problem of how we transfer the things that we used to take for granted about the way that we trained people, hands-on, face-to-face, almost apprenticeship kind of model, and how we transfer that to an overwhelmingly distanced model, which, as you say, Allan, is likely to go on for

the indefinite future to some degree. I think this is extremely challenging. I don't think, as Karen said, that we have the answers to this yet, but I do feel that a kind of counter set of values that will underlie that is starting to bubble up. And that actually gives me a lot of hope for the profession going forward.

Allan Thompson: Well, thank you. I want to thank all of you. This is the final formal panel session from an unrelenting two days of Journalism in the Time of Crisis. Thank you very much Jen, Karen and Maryn for joining us for this panel on journalism education. I think it's pretty significant that we ended this examination of the intersection of journalism and the pandemic by talking about what this means for journalism students and journalism education because they're going to carry this forward. Again, thank you very, very much.

