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[...]One of the biggest issues the press is battling in their efforts to report unbiased truths is the 24-hour news cycle. Traditionally, when a news outlet is the first to report a story, it gets recognition for breaking the news. The 24-hour news cycle amplifies the pressure of being the one to break the story because anybody can break the news or scoop the story at any given time. So, instead of taking their time to fully investigate a story to report, media outlets now are rushing to be the first to report the news, whether the facts have been fully checked or not. [...]

Another trend that has pushed the press away from truly investigative journalism is that people now expect their news in “bite-size” headlines, says Eric Holdeman, national security consultant. To meet this expectation, in-depth reporting has essentially gone by the wayside in the rush to get the news out first in a format palatable to news consumers — as a headline they can quickly skim, maybe share and consider themselves informed. [...]

People are being bombarded with information at all times, and not all of it factual. But not everyone is able to make the distinction between facts and fiction online. That’s why the press needs to re-establish itself as a reliable source for getting the facts right and educating the public to the truth. It needs to get back to its investigative roots where journalists questioned every “fact” and dug deeper to ascertain truth. In doing so, they help keep a check on those in power.

[...] At the moment, governments can more or less use digital media platforms for the explicit purpose of manipulating the public to their way of thinking — without impunity — giving them unrivaled power over public discourse. If the press can’t find a way to live up to its role as the guardian of truth and intervene on behalf of the people, then fake news, misinformation and biased reporting will irreparably tip the scales of power away from the people.

From “Rebuilding the Fourth Estate: The Press’s Role in the Digital Age Era”

By Bonnie McDonald, *Epic Presence*, March 10th, 2020

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In the early two-thousands, Martin Gurri, a media analyst at the Central Intelligence Agency, began considering the political implications of the Internet. Vast numbers of people were writing online, and the ideas that they shared could tank stocks, sway elections, or spark revolutions. “I realized that the Internet offered a near-infinite number of new sources,” Gurri later wrote. “I was left in a state of uncertainty—a permanent condition for analysis.”

In 2014, Gurri described the consequences of this uncertainty in a self-published book called “The Revolt of the Public and the Crisis of Authority.” In the old days, he argued, it had been possible to read a newspaper or watch a newscast and feel that you’d got a good grasp of “the news.” The Internet, however, created the sense that there was always more to know—and this was “an acid, corrosive to authority.” Because everyone could read only a

slice of the Internet, the traditional mass audience was splitting into communities which, Gurri thought, had a characteristic mood: they enjoyed taking apart arguments from authority and the destruction of received opinion. “Every expert is surrounded by a horde of amateurs eager to pounce on every mistake and mock every unsuccessful prediction or policy,” Gurri wrote. And yet, “the public opposes, but does not propose.” Demolishing ideas is easy in a subreddit; crafting new ones there is mostly beside the point.

The way those in power responded to these dynamics was troubling. Their general strategy, Gurri thought, was to wish that the Internet and its “unruly public” would go away. Leaders lectured Internet users about media literacy and pushed for the tweaking of algorithms. Internet users, for their part, grew increasingly uninterested in taking leaders, institutions, and experts seriously. As the powerful and the public came to regard one another with contempt, they created “a perpetual feedback loop of failure and negation,” Gurri wrote. Nihilism—“the belief that the status quo is so abhorrent that destruction will be a form of progress”—became widespread. It could be expressed substantively (say, by rioting in the Capitol) or discursively, by asserting your right to say and believe anything you want, no matter how absurd.

From “Are we living in the Age of Info-Determinism?”

By Joshua Rothman, *The New Yorker*, August 13th, 2024

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The assassination attempt that narrowly missed Donald Trump at a campaign rally on July 13 has prompted a deluge of misinformation and disinformation online. Depending on your perspective, the attack was either a failed plot by the “deep state” to remove President Joe Biden’s rival from the 2024 presidential race or a “false flag” operation designed to generate support for Trump. In fact, the FBI issued an official statement that a 20-year-old Pennsylvania man likely acted alone when he used an assault rifle to shoot the 45th president.

But facts are rarely enough to stop the onslaught of disinformation, the deliberate use of lies and misleading claims, and misinformation, its unwitting cousin.

In addition to providing an opportunity for political actors to advance their causes, a crisis also allows hostile foreign adversaries to exploit the demand for information by filling the void with false claims. As special counsel Robert Mueller concluded in his 2019 report for the Department of Justice, the goals of foreign interests are often simply to sow division in America society. If we are busy fighting with each other, we lack the bandwidth to involve ourselves in world affairs. Information warfare allows countries like Russia, China, Iran and North Korea to attack us without firing a shot.

Long-term solutions to mitigate the challenges of disinformation require changes to the way we regulate social media, data privacy, campaign spending and political advertising. But in the meantime, we can address how we respond to a rapidly evolving information ecosystem.

From “Election Disinformation Will Lead to Chaos”

By Barbara McQuade, *TIME*, July 15th, 2024