



HANDBOOK

JOURNALISM CONNECT

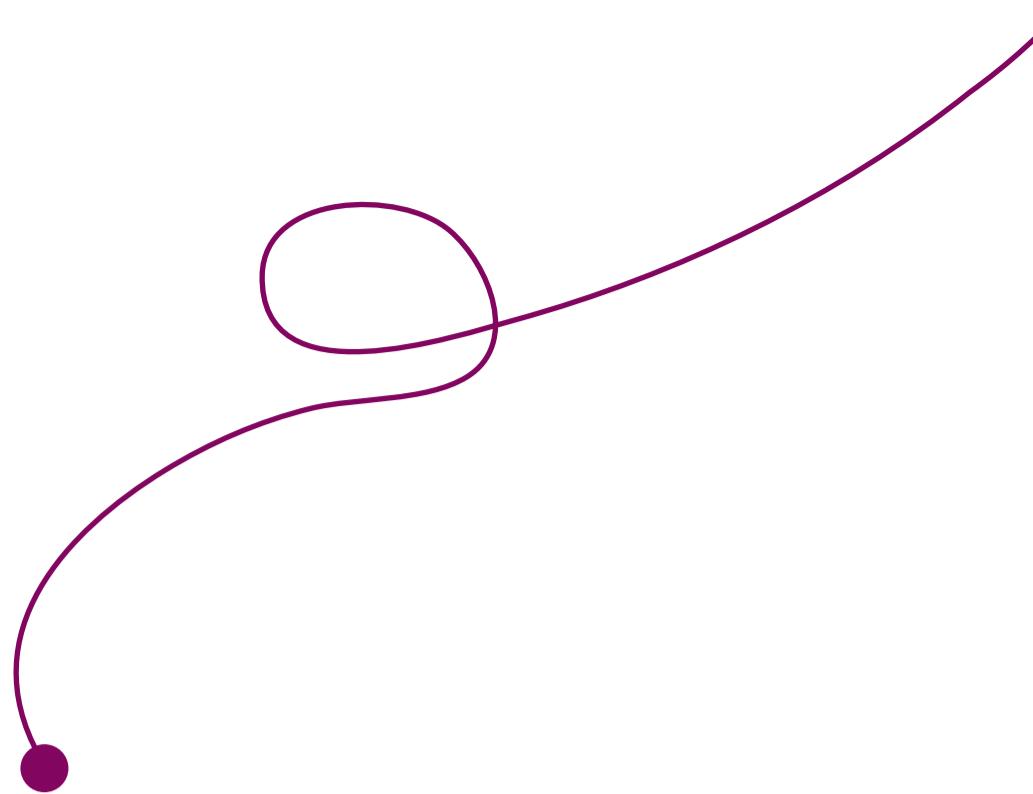
REWIRING TRUST
IN MEDIA

Asian Dispatch_

SERAPHIM
strategic communications
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GOETHE
INSTITUT
MAX MUELLER
BHAVAN



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Journalism Connect is an initiative by the Goethe-Institut in India in collaboration with Asian Dispatch, Seraphim Communications, and Deutsche Welle. The Indo-German Fellowship for journalists takes the concept of trust as a starting point for a broad examination of the current media landscape in both countries.

A knowledge and cultural exchange that has brought together 12 journalists from India and Germany towards a fellowship that hopes to spark conversations, and more than anything build solutions.

Over the course of six months, the group of 12 journalists - six from India, six from Germany - has been immersing themselves in discussions and self-introspection. The end result of that aimed to be a Knowledge Sharing Handbook- a compilation of ideas and conversations built towards finding solutions towards rewiring trust in media. They stepped back and viewed their work from a new lens- from the lens of trust. For journalists the opportunities to pause and introspect are limited in their schedules that see no bounds. But the commitment this cohort has shown to this work is commendable.

While each of them has worked on the entirety of the handbook by contributing in some way or the other, we attempt here to thank them for the parts where the majority of their efforts went.

SECTION I

INTRODUCTION TO THE HANDBOOK

All fellows

SECTION II

TRUST AND JOURNALISM

Aatreyee Dhar, Eliana Berger, Esra Lale

Secondary Support:

Janardan Pandey, Fredrich Steffes-lay,
Bo Hyun Kim

SECTION III

GOING BACK TO THE ROOTS: UNDERSTANDING ETHICS IN JOURNALISM

Kritika Goel, Ankita Deskar,

Aditya Tiwari

Secondary Support: Azeefa Fathima,

Luisa, Athithya

SECTION IV (I)

STORYTELLING THAT WINS AUDIENCE TRUST

Azeefa Fathima,

Athithya Balamurale, Bo Hyun Kim,

Janardan Pandey, Aditya Tiwari

Secondary Support: Esra Lale

SECTION IV (II)

TECH AND TRUST - UTILISING TECHNOLOGY TO OUR ADVANTAGE

Luisa von Richthofen, Friedrich Steffes-lay, Aatreyee Dhar
Secondary Support: Ankita Deskar, Eliana Berger, Kritika Goel

TEAM MEMBERS

PREEKSHA MALHOTRA

Project Coordination and Handbook Compilation

Programme Manager, Asian Dispatch and Project Manager, Journalism Connect

SHIVANSH SRIVASTAVA

Handbook Design,

Social Media and Campaigns Coordinator, Asian Dispatch

SHARANYA ESHWAR

Illustrations for Handbook

Illustrator, Asian Dispatch

SATWIK GADE

Independent Illustrator and Comic Artist

TANYA

Handbook Design,

Independent Designer

Our deepest gratitude is due to the whole team at Goethe-Institut for their continued support in making the handbook possible.

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I.

INTRODUCTION

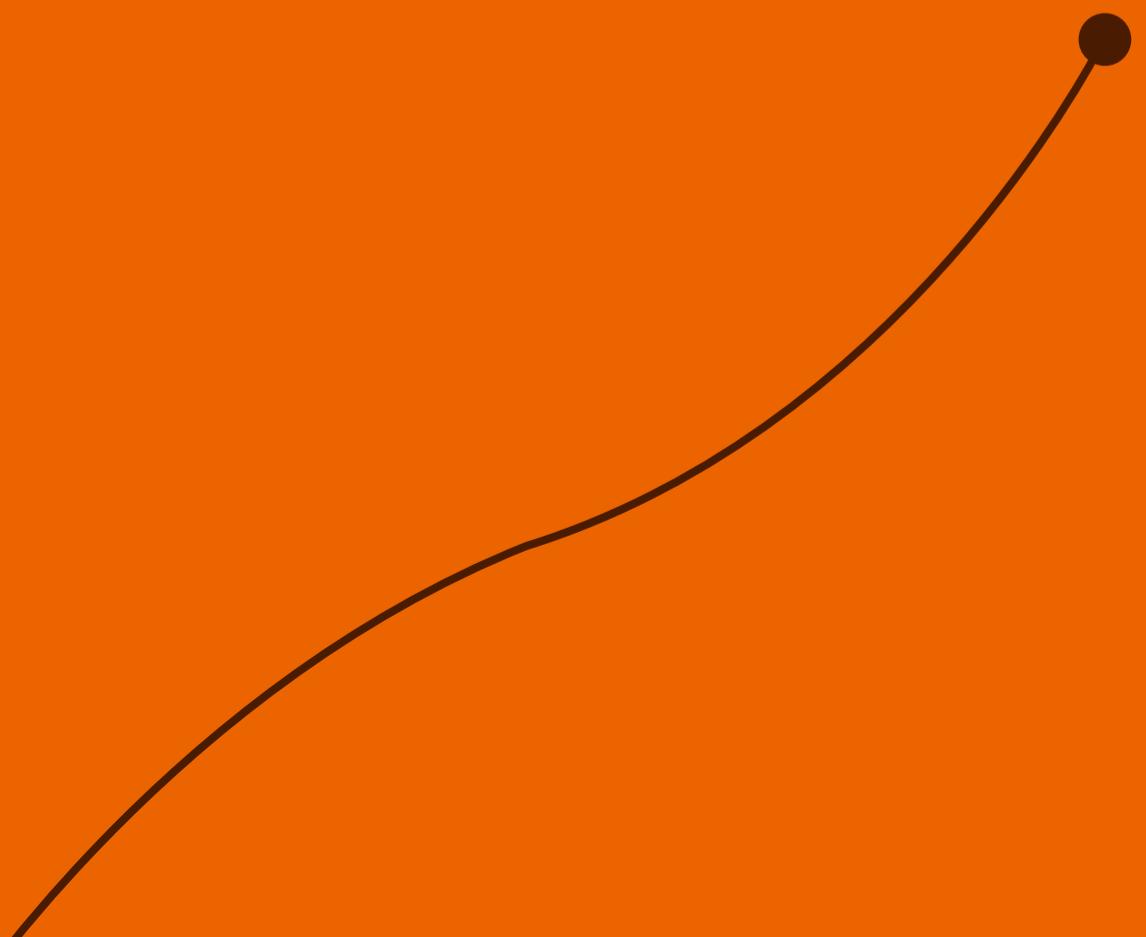




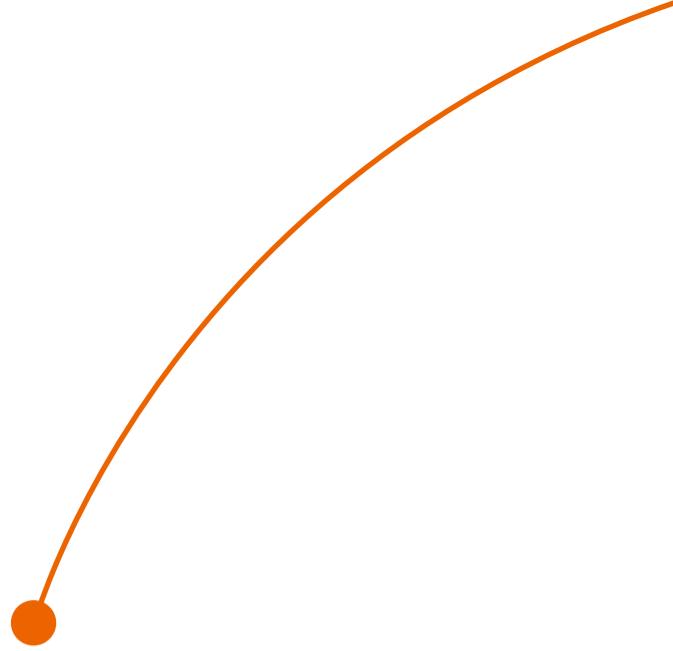
Illustration: Satwik Gade

NOTE FROM THE PARTNERS



Any democratic society is inconceivable without trust in its institutions. Trust is one of the most important resources in the 21st century: On what information can we rely? What makes a source reputable? If citizens trust the media and the information they present, they can make informed decisions, actively participate in democratic processes. However, we see that trust in these institutions, especially media is declining over the years. In this situation, it is important that journalists engage with this debate and bring it into the public arena.

With Journalism Connect, the Goethe-Institut / Max Mueller Bhavan, New Delhi and its partners are working towards strengthening exchanges between young journalists from India and Germany. The program promotes understanding of the media landscape and the situation of journalists in each other's countries. Through encounters with students and media professionals in India and Germany, participants also sharpen their own view of the future of journalism. By engaging in these discussions with our 12 fellows we hope to kindle this conversation across the Indo-German borders and beyond to support journalists rewire trust in this very important institution.



Asian Dispatch_

Asian Dispatch was born out of the trust we held in collaboration and cross-border reporting to plug a necessary gap in public interest journalism. The institution of media has evolved a lot with changing business models to mediums of operations. But what has stayed unchanged is its relevance to the masses.

Journalism Connect: Rewiring Trust in Media is a project that stands at the intersection of these core values that Asian Dispatch stands for. Bringing together 12 journalists from India and Germany we hoped to start a sustainable conversation on how we can reinstate trust in the media of the day.

This handbook is a testament to the conversations and discussions we have built with our cohort. The rigorous work that has been undertaken to write this document by our fellows will stand the test of time and become a valuable resource for journalists for the years to come.



Globally, journalism is facing a growing crisis of credibility. In Germany, too, the media have struggled with a trust deficit. The program Journalism Connect offers a valuable opportunity to address this challenge collaboratively with Indian and German journalists. Deutsche Welle (DW) Hindi has maintained a long-standing partnership with the Goethe-Institut, dating back to the radio era and earlier cooperation with Goethe-Institut / Max Mueller Bhavan. This project provides a chance to revive it.

DW has long been engaged in initiatives promoting trust in media, supported by its editorial council, and aims to foster a shared professional ethos. Our goal is to build a common understanding through joint work in the Indian context.



SERAPHIM

strategic communications

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It is a privilege for Seraphim Communications to partner with Goethe-Institut, Deutsche Welle, and Asian Dispatch for this important initiative-Journalism Connect: Rewiring Trust in Media. At a time when information is instant yet trust is fragile, journalism and communication at large has a renewed responsibility to be clear, compassionate, and credible. True communication enlightens; propaganda manipulates. The difference lies in intent: whether we inform to empower or persuade to control.

This programme has brought together an extraordinary group of talented media professionals working across borders and geographies. Their stories, perspectives, and collaborations are a testament to the power of dialogue in rebuilding faith in journalism.

We deeply appreciate their commitment and creativity since the programme began, and wish them continued success as they carry this spirit of integrity into their future work.



In the ever evolving digital world, we see global and local challenges both take on similar trajectories and cross-paths more often than we could have imagined. For the institution of media, this confluence implies greater challenges in reporting and imploring journalists to connect the dots across the borders. This digitisation also contributes to a barrage of information reaching everyone that may or may not be reliable. Thus creating a vacuum which needs to be filled through trust.

Journalism Connect is not just a fellowship bringing together journalists from across two countries. It is a programme that honors the unsaid commitment to the institution of media that each media professional holds through their work.

Bringing together 12 journalists— six Indian and six German— we have joined forces from across India and Germany to understand how to not only produce good journalism but how to regain trust in the institution. Through the words of our 12 fellows, let's take a walk through what it means to be a journalist in today's time and how we can rewire trust in media.



AATREYEE DHAR

In India, whenever we throw in the word 'trust' in journalism, we think of independent news outlets counting on readers' support for funding. But I still feel this is a myopic view of the plight of the mediascape in India. Big media firms may be in the grip of crony capitalists, but the proliferation of technology has made it easier for every individual journalist to build a brand name for themselves and disseminate news shaped through rigorous checks and balances.

However, such technological advancement has fuelled incidents of fake news and biases through algorithms built in place to prioritise views and money instead of the truth.

I think it is high time journalists are armed with the right tool-kit, journalistic values and open-source tools.



ADITYA TIWARI

In India, digital misinformation, biased coverage, and the erasure of marginalised voices pose urgent challenges for independent media. Yet, examples from India and around the world show that trust can be reclaimed. Notable stories from the recent past remind us that accountability can triumph when journalism is relentless and transparent.

There is a difference between journalism driven by genuine inquiry and a careless hunger for clicks that fuels misinformation. Trust can be rebuilt- story by story, truth by truth.

This handbook cuts through the noise by asking fundamental questions: What does transparency in media look like today? How can journalists balance immediacy with accuracy? And how can we begin to rebuild the fractured trust between media and society? It does not claim to solve the crisis, but it dares to imagine a media ecosystem that is transparent, accountable, and inclusive- a space where diverse voices finally find room to breathe, and where truth can reclaim its place amidst the noise.



ANKITA DESHKAR

While studying journalism, our professor always stressed the importance of 'verification'. He taught us to verify everything before publishing a story. Since then, I have developed the habit of checking even the smallest details. Out on the field, I frequently come across situations, especially during times of distress, that reaffirm the true purpose of journalism. It has always been about sharing verified, factual information, rather than leaving people searching for clarity.

Building trust in the media is difficult, yet it takes only one mistake to lose it. All forms of media, broadcast, print, and even digital, are struggling with the growing challenge of misinformation.

At this moment, it is crucial to return to the basics of journalism, to examine the problem of misinformation through an unbiased lens, and to bring ethics back into daily practice. Trust is eroding because bias, opinions, and the race to publish have seeped into reporting. The only way to counter this is by practising mindful, credible, and ethical journalism.



ATHITHYA BALAMURALEY

Journalism needs to reach people, it needs to be accessible in terms of language and education. Shrinking trust in the media is caused by sensationalist and negative news reporting, that focuses on problems rather than solutions.

This does not mean only reporting on the positive outcomes of an issue. Studies on constructive and solution oriented journalism have shown that a holistic approach to covering a matter helps the audience by equipping them with the tools to see things from different perspectives.

In times of polarisation, fake news and competing narratives, I strongly encourage journalists to adopt a broader perspective on issues and inform people constructively, providing context to help them understand that every issue occurs within a historical, economic and sociopolitical framework that has an immediate impact on people's lives. Journalism is urged to connect issues to their immediate outcomes in different ways.



AZEEFA FATHIMA

The erosion of trust in media is not just about misinformation or sensationalism, it is rather about invisibility. When the newsroom remains homogeneous, when editorial meetings rarely include voices from marginalized communities, and when queer, Dalit, or regional perspectives are treated as "special coverage", the audience begins to see through the gap. People stop trusting the media that does not represent them.

As a Muslim journalist who has worked in tier-3 cities and rural areas, I have seen this disconnect first-hand while meeting people who hesitate to speak to the media because they've been misrepresented or never represented at all. Their lives are complex, layered, and full of courage, yet, too often, they are reduced to stereotypes or left out entirely. Rebuilding trust, therefore, demands reimagining who holds the mic, who edits the copy, and who gets to frame the headline. Newsrooms must go beyond representation to create equitable spaces where safety, belonging, and respect are non-negotiable, and this handbook is just the first step at that.



BO HYUN KIM

Mistrust has always been part of human interaction. What has changed, however, is how visible and amplified it has become. Today, every doubt, frustration, or accusation can instantly find an audience, and skepticism often spreads faster than facts.

Simultaneously, calls for stricter control and higher standards in journalism are growing- and that is fair. We in the media have a responsibility to be transparent, accurate, and accountable. But the same expectations are not applied outside professional journalism. Individuals who mistrust the media are not held to similar standards.

This imbalance fuels misunderstanding. Situations that could once have been clarified through a quick question or a constructive conversation now easily escalate into public criticism or outrage.

For journalists, this means we must communicate more clearly, engage more openly, and listen more carefully. Building trust today is not only about delivering facts - it is about fostering dialogue, empathy, and understanding in an increasingly polarized information environment.



ELIANA BERGER

In today's polarized world, people increasingly seek out news that confirms their worldview. Social media amplifies this bias by rewarding outrage and diluting complicated topics. Professional journalism is often labelled partisan or biased. Added to this are economic pressures that encourage speed and sensationalism, which makes it harder for audiences to distinguish between careful reporting and clickbait.

Yet journalism can regain trust if it consistently lives up to its ethical and methodological standards. It must insist on nuance, transparency and independence, even when these do not immediately win clicks. A strong example is "Hunger", an investigative dossier by *DIE ZEIT* on the impact of the war in Gaza. It shows how journalism - even under severe constraints - can combine investigation, transparency and ethics while openly acknowledging uncertainties. That is especially important in a field where German coverage is struggling with audience trust.



ESRA LALE

Trust is fragile. It's not something you can simply create – it's something you have to earn.

So why this handbook? Because it's important to be honest about the insecurities and concerns many journalists have when it comes to trust. It's okay – no, it's crucial – to admit: We don't know everything. We don't always have the answers. That's difficult to say, especially because creating answers is literally our job. But I believe honesty and inward reflection are exactly what we need to confront the ongoing decline in public trust. So, back to the question: why is trust dwindling?

I think, beyond the growing complexity of the world and various political developments, one of the core reasons is the lack of deep reflection in editorial rooms about the complexity of media itself and not finding the right role in that complexity.



FRIEDRICH STEFFES-IAY

The press should be the natural point of contact for those who want to draw attention to problems, but many are skeptical that they might be misrepresented, or not represented at all. This distrust has a lot to do with loud, sensationalist reporting that is competing with other media and social platforms for attention. Minor issues are turned into scandals, statements are taken out of context. Over time, this erodes people's trust in speaking to journalists.

Journalism is now perceived less as a marketplace of ideas and more as a homogeneous product. That's because journalism is largely produced by people with similar backgrounds and views. During the 2015 refugee crisis and the 2020 pandemic, concerns and viewpoints were stigmatized. Right-wing parties and populists have exploited this dynamic, occupying that space in public debate and have further eroded public trust in journalism. A bit more composure, and the courage to reflect "uncomfortable" opinions would do journalists good.



JANARDAN PANDEY

In the early 2010s, when I filed stories, I was asked to provide all perspectives and multiple pieces of evidence before a story was published. Every detail was verified.

Between 2013 and 2025, however, my experience across several legacy media houses has been very different. Editorial checks were almost absent. The only question asked was: How many users did you bring?

Editorial policies on accuracy and trust may exist on paper, but they are rarely communicated or enforced, despite hundreds of stories being published daily.

Trust in Indian media began eroding long ago but the steepest decline came with the rise of digital media, when countless unverified and misleading stories flooded audiences. Unless urgent reforms are introduced, the very survival of the media is at risk.



KRITIKA GOEL

In journalism, speed and accuracy go hand-in-hand but when the latter is compromised for the former it shakes the foundation on which this fourth pillar of democracy stands—trust.

For decades, citizens had complete faith in what they read in the paper or saw on news, but the primetime TRP race and sensationalism have dented this credibility. Facts have taken a back seat and viral/clickbait content has assumed greater power.

It's also a result of growing political polarisation, changing power structures across the world, and shrinking budgets among other factors.

Journalists must go back to our roots and help rebuild the trust. The most basic principles such as ensuring accuracy, fact-checking, and unbiased reporting can play an important role. I vividly remember what one of my seniors once told me during an Indian election coverage trip— "when in doubt, cut it out." A false piece of content is far more dangerous and can have real world consequences. I live by that.



LUISA VON RICHTHOFEN

The current decline of trust in the media reflects a broader erosion of confidence in societal institutions. Surveys¹ show that growing segments of the population fundamentally reject key pillars of the German media system.

Political polarization means that critics from both left and right accuse the media of bias. The term *Lügenpresse* ("lying press"), revived during the 2015 refugee crisis, encapsulates this mistrust.

As audiences shift from TV and newspapers to social media and alternative platforms, traditional media loses its authority. Competing narratives, including disinformation and conspiracy content and the rise of "echo chambers", fuels doubt about established outlets' neutrality.

Shrinking budgets have made newsrooms increasingly reliant on wire services and sensationalist framing. The closure of local outlets reinforces the impression that the peripheries are ignored and that news is concentrated in the hands of an "elite." And now, the rise of AI is likely to bring new challenges.

TRUST AND JOURNALISM



91% JOURNALISTS
SAY TRUST IN MEDIA IN
THEIR REGION IS FALLING

Illustration: Satwik Gade

WHAT IS TRUST?

Trust is a foundation of human coexistence. We have to trust everywhere. Trust that our drinking water is clean and our houses are built solidly. That our friends won't share what we confide in them and that we can work together with our colleagues in a spirit of trust. Otherwise, our modern, complex lives would simply not be possible. As American psychologist Julian Rotter puts it: "The entire fabric of our day-to-day living, of our social world, rests on trust... almost all our decisions involve trusting someone else."

Rotter has dealt extensively with the concept of "trust" in his work, and his definitions have had a formative influence on psychology. He describes trust as "an expectancy held by an individual or group that the word, promise, verbal or written statement of another person or group can be relied upon."

"Trust is accepted vulnerability to another's possible but not expected ill will".



A philosophical approach by Annette Baier takes up another central theme. "Trust then, on first approximation," she writes, "is accepted vulnerability to another's possible but not expected ill will (or lack of good will) toward one." In addition to positive expectations of others' behavior, this vulnerability, which inevitably follows from trust, is the second important pillar if we want to understand trust.

When we apply the concepts of trust to media, it becomes important to distinguish between terms. In a paper on media trust, communication scientist Diego Garusi and social and political scientist Sergio Splendore draw attention to the difference between "trust" and "credibility". They argue that credibility is an attribute of the media- and trust is a relationship between audiences and the media: people decide whether to rely on the media and place trust in them. It is, however, a definition by Thomas Hanitzsch that captures the essence of trust in media. With specific regard to news media, he argues that trust entails "the willingness of the audience to be vulnerable to news content based on the expectation that the media will perform in a satisfactory manner."

International public broadcasters enjoy the highest levels of trust in India.

Against this backdrop, the lack of trust in the media that we are currently observing in both India and Germany is concerning. A long-term study by Johannes Gutenberg University² shows that in 2024, about 20 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that the population in Germany is being "systematically lied to" by the media. Reuters Institute figures show that trust in German media has dropped significantly from 60 to 43 percent since 2015³. However, it should be noted that this figure has stabilized in recent years, with Germany still ranking relatively highly in an international context.

In India, trust in the media is lower, but has been more stable in recent years. According to the Reuters Institute's assessment, it stood at 38 percent in 2021 and has since risen slightly to 41 percent in 2024⁴. International public broadcasters such as All Indian Radio and the BBC enjoy the highest levels of trust, while partisan commercial broadcasters and independent digital portals are the most distrusted.

HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

In this handbook, we address the question of why trust in journalism and the media is declining. We analyze the problems that journalism faces today- but above all, we aim to offer practical and interactive solutions. Each chapter provides insights, analyses, and hands-on tools that can be applied to everyday journalistic work.

SECTION II

In this section, a QR code takes you to videos that explore the reasons behind the erosion of trust in media. We examine phenomena such as populism, disinformation, and a lack of transparency, and look at how these issues play out differently in the Indian and German media landscapes.

SECTION III

In Section III, we focus on ethical journalism. Rather than simply presenting a list of rules, we invite you to engage with realistic scenarios and reflect on how you would act when faced with unexpected challenges in the newsroom. Alongside this interactive exercise, you will find illustrated guidelines that serve as practical references for day-to-day editorial work.

SECTION IV (I)

Section IV (i) explores storytelling that wins trust. We discuss what genuine diversity in newsrooms looks like and how it can be strengthened. You'll find advice on the Do's and Don'ts of reporting on vulnerable communities, best practices, and insights into the importance of vernacular journalism. This chapter includes illustrations, an interactive game, and a multimedia guide to immersive storytelling.

SECTION IV (II)

Are you good at recognizing AI-generated content? You'll find out in Section IV (ii), which is entitled "Tech and Trust". A quiz lets you test your ability to spot and debunk AI-generated fakes, supported by video tutorials and guides on effective fact-checking. You will learn how ChatGPT and similar tools can support newsroom workflows. We have also put together a poster of AI guidelines for distribution in newsrooms.

We hope this handbook inspires you to explore, reflect and experiment - so that we might be successful in our goal: rewiring trust in media.

Enjoy discovering!



Illustration: Satwik Gade

REASONS BEHIND EROSION OF TRUST

Why is trust eroding? That is a question many journalists are trying to answer. And the answer is: many more questions. And that is okay! Because our job requires us to ask questions, so why not ask them about ourselves and our work?

Am I connected to the people I am reporting on?

Do I really fully understand what I am writing or saying, so my audience can understand it?

Is my language accessible?

Am I biased?

Am I trying to convince or inform?

Is my research enough?

Which format is really needed to reach my audience?

Many of you are already asking these questions every day. Our job is getting harder, more complex, and more vulnerable every day. So, let's do what we do best: research the answers!

There are many studies providing direction for our work. In Germany, for example, there is the *Mainzer Langzeitstudie*⁵. The newest findings of the study show that trust of the German population in established media currently stands at about 44-47 percent and has stabilized after an increase during the COVID-19 pandemic, returning to a level similar to before the pandemic. Public broadcasters (ARD, ZDF) enjoy the highest level of trust, while online media and private broadcasters are viewed more critically and have lower trust ratings.

A closer look at the study shows that trust in media can change when it comes to specific events. Trust in reporting on Palestine and Israel is comparatively low. Only 27 percent of respondents trust these media reports "completely" or "mostly," while an equal number of respondents view this coverage with significant distrust. These figures are the lowest compared to other controversially discussed topics such as the Ukraine war or climate change.

Another study, a representative survey conducted by Infratest Dimap for the NDR media magazine ZAPP⁶, shows that almost half of respondents (48%) have little or no trust in German media coverage of Israel and Palestine. These levels go beyond the usual baseline mistrust in the media.

As a journalist working in Germany, I can attest that the first question many people ask me when they meet me, "Can you always talk about Palestine the way you want to?"—assuming censorship. I can also attest that many colleagues have had the feeling their work could be and was compromised when reporting on Palestine and Israel.

This year Germany dropped out of the Top 10 countries on the press freedom index from *Reporter ohne Grenzen* ("Reporters without borders"). Reasons for this decline range from attacks from the far right to clashes with the police as per RSF. They also note that these hurdles were faced on the editorial level with "severely narrowed range of acceptable opinions when working on Israel and Palestine" faced by many journalists⁷.



Illustration: Satwik Gade

To sum it up: Reports on Israel and Palestine are one of the most current and urgent reasons for eroding trust in the context of German media right now, since it dominates the news and polarizes the audience for several months at the same time. So what to do? A self-reflective questioning of our work is the first of many steps journalists in Germany should take – not to choose a side, but to uphold the principles of good journalism!

But it's by far not the only reason for eroding trust. Changes in media, populism, and lack of transparency are just a few more examples. How these affect our work also depends greatly on our perspective.

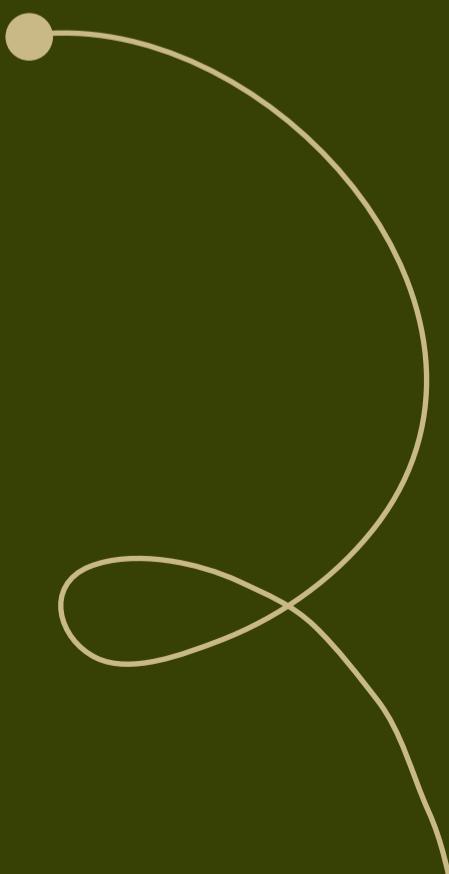
Journalists in India face challenges, as do journalists in Germany. These challenges can be and surely are different, but the will to tackle them and rebuild trust in our work is what connects us.

So we made multiple videos with an Indian perspective, scripted and presented by Aatreeye Dhar, and one with a German perspective, scripted by Esra Lale, presented by Athithya Balamurale.

Enjoy the videos!



III.



GOING **BACK** TO THE **ROOTS** OF **JOURNALISM**

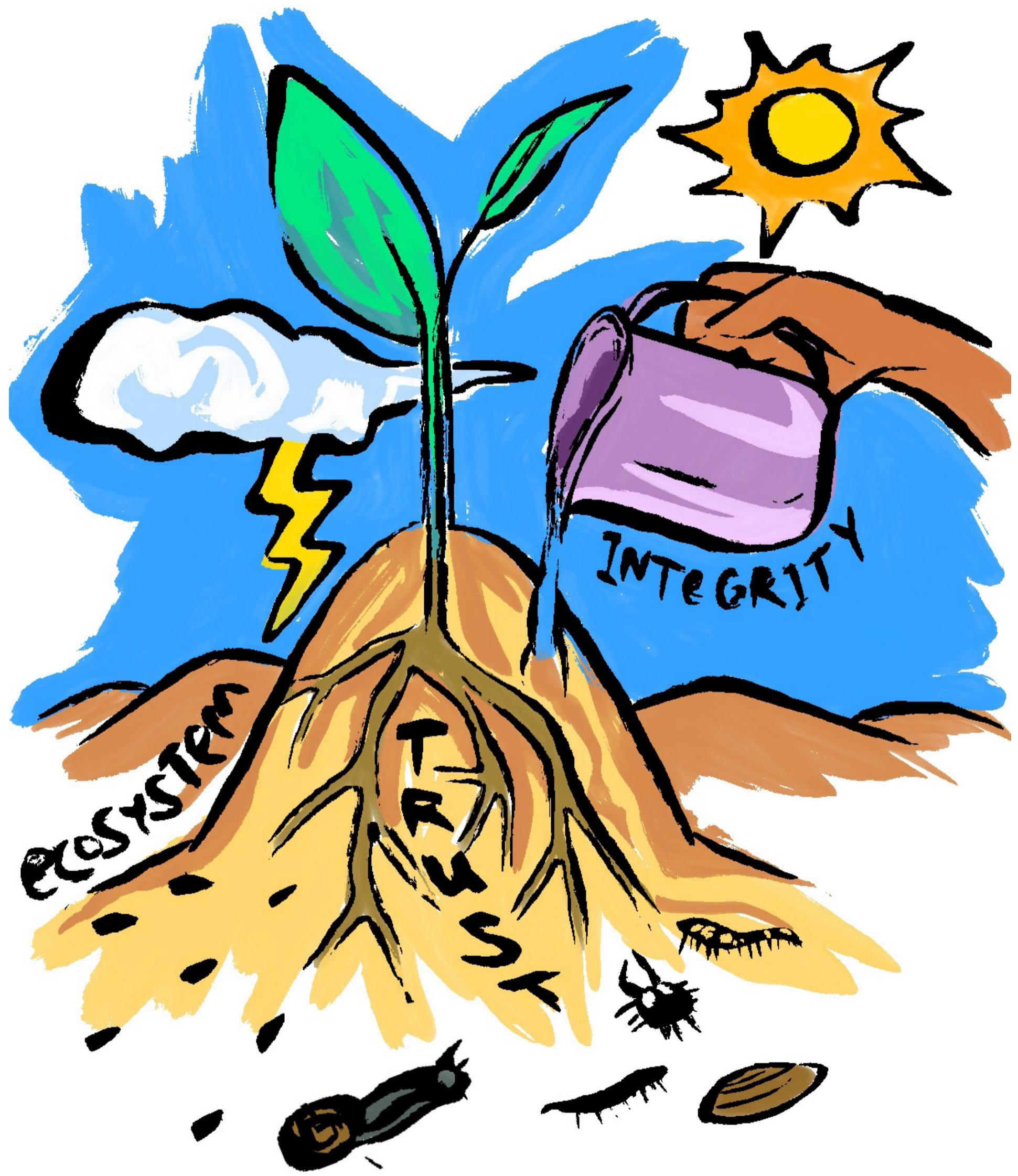


Illustration: Satwik Gade



WHAT IS ETHICAL JOURNALISM?

The practice of reporting with truth and accuracy—free from political bias, commercial pressure, serving the interest of the public, and most importantly, speaking truth to power. It is guided by the principles of independence, accountability, and integrity, where diversity, inclusivity, and dignity are the core values.



THE REAL WORLD IMPACT OF UNETHICAL JOURNALISM

1 PRIVACY...WHAT?

STING OPERATION ON 'GAY CULTURE' IN HYDERABAD, INDIA BY A REGIONAL BROADCASTER.

How would you react if you saw your personal chats and photos from a dating app on the news? Sounds bizarre, right?

Well, this is what happened in India in 2011 when a regional language news channel decided to air a programme titled "Gay Culture Rampant in Hyderabad." The channel shared photos and personal details of individuals from a networking site for gay men, violating their privacy and reinforcing stereotypes. The channel also called some of these individuals and asked them to discuss their sexual preferences. The News Broadcasting Standards Authority (NBSA)⁸ took "suo-motu"⁹ cognisance of the case, following the complaints it received via email and summoned the channel.

The said channel was found in violation of Clauses 5 (Sex and Nudity), 6 (Privacy), and 9 (Sting Operations) of the Code of Ethics binding on the members of the NBSA. The channel was asked to air an apology during fixed hours for three consecutive days and was fined INR one lakh (-1,128 USD).

The authority had also noted that the overall impact of the programme was to make a "sensationalised depiction of gay culture alleged to be prevalent in Hyderabad".

This case exposes deeper problems, which is the lack of LGBTQIA+ representation in editorial teams and the sensational framing of queer identities as "issues" rather than lived realities.

2 MISREPORTING MENACE

AMERICAN NEWS OUTLET'S INACCURATE STORY ABOUT QURAN DESECRATION CAUSED LARGE-SCALE VIOLENCE, CLAIMED LIVES.

“U.S. Military Officials Flush Down Quran at Guantánamo Bay.”

What do you think the reaction to such a news headline would be? No points for guessing – it would be catastrophic and IT WAS!

In 2005, an American weekly news magazine¹⁰ admitted that it published inaccurate information about the alleged desecration of the Quran by the U.S. military interrogators at Guantánamo Bay. This was after the story led to massive protests.

The article had claimed that the interrogators flushed a copy of the Quran down the toilet. The protests, across several Muslim-majority countries, left at least 17 dead and more than 100 injured.

In Afghanistan, the unrest sparked street violence, with attacks on government offices and threats from religious leaders to declare holy war if those responsible were not punished. The protests spread to Pakistan, Indonesia, Gaza, and Lebanon, where senior clerics demanded an international inquiry.

The outlet's editor later issued a statement expressing regret for inaccuracies in the story and extended sympathies to the victims of the violence.

The incident highlights how inaccuracies in reporting can claim lives. While the outlet defended its editorial process and acknowledged the error, it raises questions over media responsibility.

(Note: The headline in the second case study has been written for illustrative purposes.)

3 MANUFACTURED 'FACTS'

AN IMAGINARY 8 YEAR OLD ADDICT AND A VERY REAL PULITZER PRIZE.

In 1981, an American journalist wrote a feature story¹¹ about an “eight-year-old heroin addict” in a major U.S. city. The piece was powerful and emotionally charged, presenting a harrowing picture of urban drug abuse. The story won the Pulitzer Prize, one of the most coveted awards.

However, the story turned out to be entirely fabricated and the award was returned – the only time this has happened due to fabrication.

This case became a landmark in media history because it:

- Exposed serious lapses in the editorial process of fact-checking at a leading publication.
- Sparked a global debate on journalistic ethics and credibility.
- Became a widely studied example in journalism schools on the importance of verification and accountability.

A similar incident happened in Germany.

In 2018, a German weekly magazine¹² revealed that one of its noted reporters had fabricated his stories. For example: a piece about a woman traveling across America to witness death-row executions turned out to be completely made-up. The publication admitted the fraud openly, publishing a special cover explaining how the reporter

had deceived colleagues and abused the magazine's processes.

The implications extended beyond the story of one reporter. The US ambassador to Germany accused the magazine of “institutional bias” against America, while German media commentators warned that the scandal damaged trust in journalism more broadly, giving ammunition to far-right movements that label the press as 'lying media'.

These are just a few examples of how unethical and inaccurate reporting can negatively impact the society. It illustrates how societies rely on the information shared by the media and highlights the power news organisations hold in the social hierarchy.

While there can be several ways to ensure ethical reporting and news delivery, here is a quick checklist that could help journalists and news organisations rebuild trust.



**WHAT CAN
NEWS
ORGANISATIONS
DO TO**

**REBUILD
TRUST?**



1. TRANSPARENCY

Scholars have argued¹³ that transparency is one of the key factors in restoring trust in media but how newsrooms practice transparency determines the outcome.

The Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics¹⁴ underscores that accountability and transparency is essential for journalism and it is defined as "taking responsibility for one's work and explaining one's decisions to the public". A Knight Foundation Survey¹⁵ defines transparency as "disclosing potential conflicts of interest and making additional reporting material available to readers".

However, in contrast, a fellowship paper published by a Finnish journalist on the website of Reuters Institute¹⁶ argues that transparency could potentially be seen as the opposite of trust. "I don't require further information because I trust you as a source," he writes. Comparing transparency to a mirage, he writes, "It looks promising from afar, but as you get closer, its promises evaporate." Referring to the issue of trust in media as a more layered and complex issue, the journalist through his interviews builds on the argument that transparency could potentially have a role to play but we might have to lower our expectations.

On the back of this, while we suggest that newsrooms be transparent, we don't argue that transparency could fill the trust deficit alone. It needs to be read in tandem with a whole lot of things to rebuild trust.

WHAT ENTAILS TRANSPARENCY?

THE MONEY

It's crucial for newsrooms to be transparent about their sources of funding. Financial transparency provides clarity about the editorial policy, as the money often decides how the story will be told.

THE SOURCES

Provide clarity on whether the information you have had access to was a primary or secondary source. In case you need to conceal the identity of a source, be transparent about that.

THE CORRECTIONS

To err is human, but what's unacceptable is not recognising those mistakes. Newsrooms must have correction policies in place and admit publicly when an error is made.



2. FACT-CHECKING

Over the last decade, fact-checking has exploded as a separate branch of journalism, but verification has always been an important pillar. Journalists have always been expected to fact-check information before a story is published. With social media, fact-checking has become a specialised skill, but newsrooms need to ensure that the stories they publish are:

- a) Accurate
- b) Verified
- c) Contextualised

It's the notion that the media spreads inaccurate information ("fake news") that has dented the credibility of newsrooms. This is not to argue that organisations aren't partisan or don't have vested interests, but there are organisations across the world which still uphold the ethos of journalism.

We will explore fact-checking separately as a section later in this handbook.

3. INTERACTION WITH AUDIENCES

Audiences are no longer passive consumers of news. The digital information ecosystem has changed dramatically. With content creators pushing out short-form videos (Reels, Shorts, etc), which are tailor-made for audiences they intend to reach, it's become difficult for newsrooms to compete with them. In fact, the content these creators generate is more accessible, relatable, and often piggybacks on viral trends.

However, it's not always factual, but that's where the real challenge is. News, on the other hand, might seem boring, takes time to produce, and doesn't have the usual sensational components. So, newsrooms must devise a strategy to interact with their audiences.

We have explored this in detail in the next section.

4. INCLUSIVITY AND DIVERSITY (DISABILITY, CASTE, CLASS, GENDER)

Newsrooms should be inclusive not only in their storytelling but also in terms of their editorial structure. To ensure inclusivity, organisations should ensure that they promote diversity and equality.

REPORTING ON CASTE:

- **Avoid** creating hierarchies by using terms such as 'lower caste' and 'upper caste'.
- **Avoid** further marginalisation of underprivileged castes.
- **Respect** the privacy of marginalised communities.
- **Seek explicit consent** while photographing women and children from marginalised (or any) communities.

REPORTING ON GENDER:

- **Avoid** using terms such as 'third gender', as it creates hierarchies.
- **Don't** assume, ask what pronouns individuals use.
- **Ensure** your reporting doesn't further marginalise or stigmatise the LGBTQIA+ community.
- **Be respectful** and don't sensationalise the story.

The News Minute has an extensive guide on gender inclusivity, which could be a great starting point for the newsrooms. You can access it [here](#)¹⁷.



REPORTING ON DISABILITY:

- **Language matters:** Don't identify the individual with just their disability. Place the person first.
- **Create awareness:** Shed light on the topic of disability through your reporting to challenge age-old notions.
- **Create opportunities:** Rely on people with disabilities for their expertise and knowledge, and don't just use them to generate sympathy. Normalise them and look beyond their disability. Treat them with respect and equality.

People with disabilities also have the same level of emotions, skills, talent, and knowledge as anyone else.

Start a conversation and treat them as an equal member of society. You can read an extensive guide on how to report on disabilities [here¹⁸](#).

Now that we have discussed some strategies and looked at a few examples to understand what ethical journalism stands for, let's glance through a quick checklist of do's and don'ts to better understand the landscape.

DO'S AND DON'TS FOR CURRENT MEDIA LANDSCAPE

DON'T

DON'T FABRICATE:

A single made-up detail can destroy careers and trust.

DON'T DISTORT REALITY:

Cropping an image or trimming a quote is a quiet form of lying.

DON'T LEAN ON ONE VOICE:

A story told from only one angle is half a story. Rely on multiple sources, look for evidence.

DON'T STEREOTYPE:

Words shape how people see entire communities. Be careful.

PRIVATE LIFE IS PRIVATE:

Curiosity isn't a justification to intrude.

DON'T SWEEP ERRORS

UNDER THE RUG:

Silence after a mistake erodes credibility faster than the mistake itself.

DON'T TAKE GIFTS OR FAVORS:

These could cast a shadow of doubt on your integrity.

DON'T CAPITALISE ON PAIN:

Clickbait headlines can harm real people behind the story.

DON'T PUBLISH SOMETHING THAT COULD PUT SOMEONE IN DANGER:

Check what you write.

DO

CROSS-VERIFY:

It won't hurt to make that extra phone call for confirmation.

TELL THE WHOLE STORY, NOT JUST A SLICE:

Add context and don't omit details that could alter the reality.

BE TRANSPARENT:

If there is a correction, own it, and if you have a bias, acknowledge it.

RESPECT:

Your empathy matters as much as your questions. Don't disrespect people who trust you with their stories.

ACKNOWLEDGE:

Credit people for their work, attribute their inputs.

CHOOSE HUMANITY OVER SPECTACLE:

Your job is to inform, not exploit. Show truth, but don't make tragedy a headline circus.

STAND YOUR GROUND:

Resist pressure from advertisers, politicians, or editors who push an agenda.

OWN YOUR MISTAKES:

Corrections show strength, not weakness.

EXPLAIN, DON'T JUST REACT:

Add context, explain, and resist oversimplifying for clicks.

You're not the story: Journalism isn't about you. It's about the people who speak to you, and the people you write for.

Now that you have gone over some do's and don'ts and closely looked at what ethical journalism is, let's dive into a few quick scenarios to see how you will respond to it.

LET'S DISCUSS SCENARIOS

Objective: The purpose of this exercise is to think of the best way forward. While there are options mentioned, it's possible that the best answer isn't a part of the options. So, step in the shoes of a journalist and think!

1 A WHISTLEBLOWER AND A SENSATIONAL STORY

A whistleblower secretly hands over classified documents alleging widespread surveillance of citizens by the government. The journalist feels pressure to break the story quickly because of its potential impact, but they have limited ability to verify the whistleblower's identity and claims.

What should the journalist do?

Trust the whistleblower and publish the documents.

Verify the documents and risk losing the story to competitors.

The journalist decides to wait and verify the documents. Nobody has picked up the story yet. The whistleblower's documents are real, and the allegations are correct. But the journalist is told by their network not to publish the story because the government is involved.

What should you do?

There are no right or wrong answers for this scenario. It's about ethics, integrity, and what you think is the right way forward.

2 READERSHIP VS A MINOR'S FUTURE:

You are a crime reporter who is covering a story that involves a minor. During your investigation, you find sensitive information about the minor, including a history of child abuse and sexual assault. This information is important but not critical to the story. However, you are told by your seniors to focus on the child abuse angle for better viewership.

What do you do?

You include the sensitive details but withhold the name of the minor. However, some details could potentially reveal their identity.

You don't print the sensitive details, but this could weaken your story.

3 CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND A DILEMMA:

You are assigned to investigate an alleged corruption scam in a tech company, and you discover the senior executives of the organisation are linked to your distant family. You firmly believe that you will remain impartial and bring out the truth.

What are your best options?

Cover the story anyway without mentioning your family connection, trusting your own impartiality.

Investigate the story as a secondary reporter, let the primary reporter take the editorial decisions, but you don't disclose the conflict internally or to your viewers.

Recuse yourself.

4 GRAPHIC CONTENT FROM A WAR ZONE:

You're a photojournalist who has captured images of civilian casualties, including women and children, from a war zone. The images are powerful enough to raise international awareness, but sharing them risks traumatising viewers, undermining victims' dignity, and endangering surviving family members.

What is the best way forward?

Publish the raw images to show the brutal reality of war and attract global attention.

Blur faces or describe the scene in writing to respect victims' dignity and avoid retraumatization.

5 PRIVACY VS PUBLIC INTEREST:

A leaked medical report reveals a well-known public figure's serious illness, which may affect their ability to serve in office. While the news may be relevant to voters, publishing the details may also violate privacy and ethical medical boundaries.

What is the best way forward?

Publish every detail about the public figure's health because this is important information for voters.

Share only what's necessary, respecting medical privacy.

6 DEEPFAKE OR AI-GENERATED EVIDENCE:

A video of a government official accepting bribe surfaces online. The video goes viral, and the editor pushes for coverage, but the journalist notices irregularities suggesting it might be AI-generated. Before publishing, they must investigate but they are being "told to do as they are told".

What should the journalist do?

Publish the viral video, indicating that there was no independent verification at the time of publishing.

Investigate the video's authenticity and then publish, even if this means losing viewership.

WHY ETHICS MATTER?

Journalism is called the fourth pillar of democracy. While it's essential to bring out the truth, facts, and be unbiased, it's equally critical to respect privacy and boundaries. There is a life behind every story, and reporters must understand this and work with empathy.

Sensational reporting erodes public trust, negatively impacts vulnerable individuals or groups, and reduces stories to sensational tropes. Credible journalism, in contrast, upholds standards of fact-checking, context, and integrity. It may even endure pressure or scandal, but ultimately reinforces democracy, accountability, and public trust.

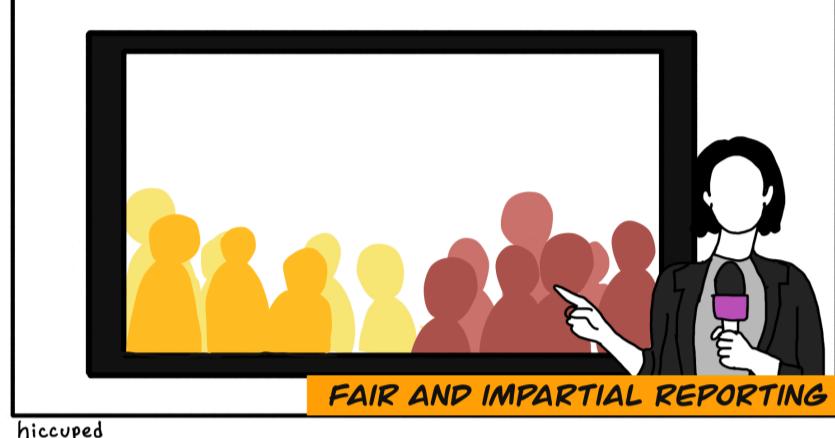
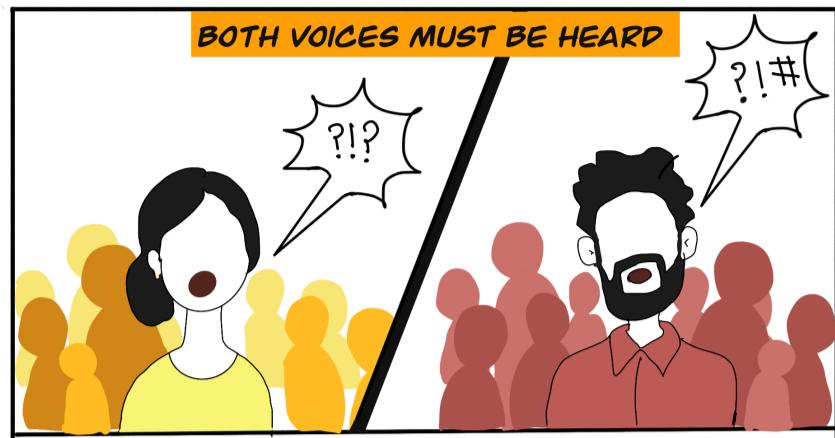
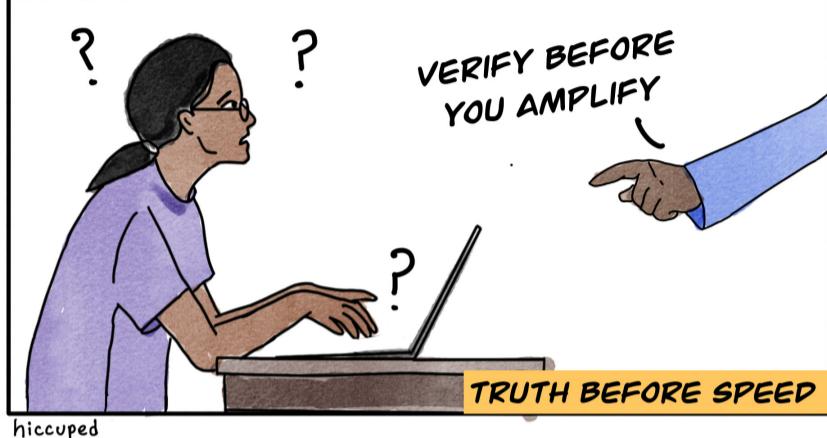


Illustration: Sharanya Eshwar

LET'S PLAY A GAME

(You can play this game in a newsroom set up)

HEADLINE FIXERS

Objective: Readers come across headlines that grab attention, but not always for the right reasons. In this game, you will put on your editor's hat and decide which headline crosses the line.

What's your mission?

Spot the Spin: Identify if the headline is sensational, biased, or factually inaccurate.

Fix It: Rewrite it.

Earn points!

+2 points for correctly identifying the problem.

+3 points for a clear, balanced rewrite.

+1 point bonus, if your new headline still hooks the reader without exaggeration.

ROUND I: THE HEADLINES

- EXCLUSIVE: Gay sex racket busted in Delhi's posh colony.
- Black man held for assaulting children in Germany.
- This is what the Prime Minister said about women's safety...
- Stampede at religious gathering in India. Pics inside.
- WHO confirms Coca-Cola contains Cancer-causing content.
- Your air fryer is going to kill you! Read why.
- Love Jihad: Muslim man tricks Hindu woman into marrying him.
- Pakistan is supporting the Taliban's war in Afghanistan. Video proof inside.

ROUND II: THE FIX

For each headline, write what's wrong in one line (e.g., biased wording, fear-mongering, missing context). Then, rewrite it as a responsible headline.



**Your air fryer
is going to
kill you! Read
why.**

**Experts warn
against misusing
air fryers: key
safety tips
inside.**

REFLECTION BONUS:

After you're done, think about:

- Which headline was hardest to fix and why?
- How does language shape your perception of people or events?
- Would you have clicked on your fixed version and trusted it?

Remember, headlines should give your readers information about your story, but how you contextualise and provide it is up to you.

SELF REFLECTION

Ethical journalism is not just about rigid rules and guidelines, but it is about intent, integrity, and also accountability. Journalism exists to inform and not to influence, it exists to hold people in positions of power accountable and not become a part of it. Ethics must be a collective newsroom culture and these choices must further be embedded in editorial processes. Ethical journalism is the soul of a profession that exists to serve the public good.



LOOKING TOWARDS

SOLUTIONS:

STORYTELLING
THAT WINS AUDIENCE

TRUST



DERIVING ENGAGEMENT

ANCHOR'S PERSONALITY OR JOURNALIST NEUTRALITY



Illustration: Satwik Gade

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN NEWSROOMS



Illustration: Shivansh Srivastava

WHO GETS TO TELL THE STORY CHANGES THE STORY

For too long, newsrooms have relied on a narrow set of perspectives.

This flipbook explores how storytelling transforms when a more diverse community of storytellers are part of the process itself, and how inclusion reshapes not just stories, but the way we see the world.

WHY IT MATTERS



Diversity is not a “good look” for newsrooms, but it is the difference between shallow reporting and deep, credible journalism.

Any incident looks very different when reported by someone who grew up in the locality versus someone who parachutes in for a week.



Illustration: Shivansh Srivastava

Local reporters should be prioritized whenever possible, given the context and nuance they bring. However, when a local reporter isn't available, the journalist in question - whether from outside the area or a metropolis - should follow clear ethical practices.

See Annexure 1: Best practices on page 51.

TOKENISM: THE "ONE- SEAT" PROBLEM

Hiring one Dalit journalist or one queer person does not make a newsroom inclusive.

Tokenism keeps people at the table but out of real decisions.



Illustration: Shivansh Srivastava

REAL DIVERSITY MEANS SHARED POWER

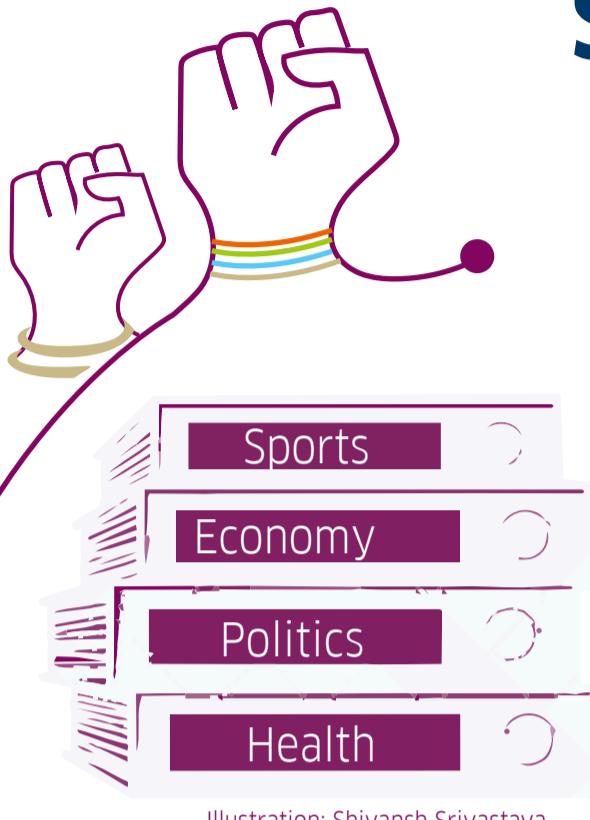


Illustration: Shivansh Srivastava

True diversity shows up in editorial meetings, leadership positions, and story assignments. Queer journalists are often brought in as “specialists,” but sidelined from mainstream beats; and trans journalists are still not visible.

True inclusion means LGBTQIA+ journalists must have space to tell their own stories, not have them filtered through non-queer voices that risk bias or tokenism. During Pride Month, for example, queer and trans voices should be centered rather than replaced by performative allyship. Editors must actively platform

fresh perspectives instead of recycling the same dominant ones. Importantly, queer journalists should not be forced into covering 'queer' stories; representation also means having the agency to choose their beats.



Illustration: Shivansh Srivastava

INSIDE THE NEWSROOM

Diversity is fragile without inclusion. A queer person or trans person might get hired, but if every meeting interrupts their voice or if they are ostracised within the office, they are forced to leave because of a hostile work environment, which might be created because of unconscious bias (see Annex 2). Exclusion can manifest in various forms, including everyday language and micro ways.

Inclusion is culture: whose jokes are laughed at, whose mistakes are forgiven, whose ideas are taken seriously.

INTERSECTIONALITY

No identity stands alone. A Dalit woman journalist faces caste and gender barriers. A queer Muslim reporter with physical disability navigates multiple layers of bias. There are also invisible disabilities, like neurodivergence, which might not even find their way into discussions.

Intersectionality reminds us: diversity cannot be one-dimensional.

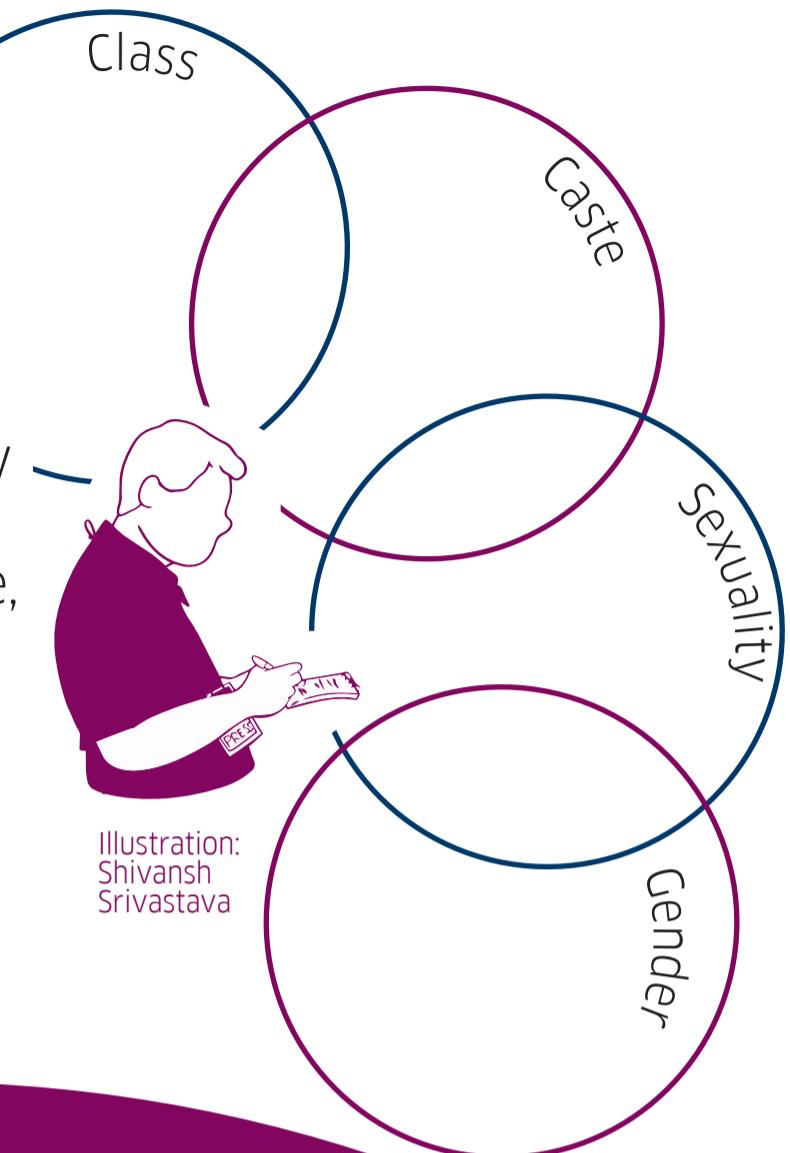


Illustration: Shivansh Srivastava

BEYOND VISIBLE IDENTITIES

Diversity is also not just about what you can see. Factors like class, caste, language, race, colour, queerness, religion, region, disability, life experiences and other factors, seen or unseen, that a person brings to the

table need to be kept in mind.

It's not just hiring someone who 'conventionally' looks different and fits the mold. But also equipping and empowering them.

For example, how many newsrooms think about hiring wheelchair users, when most offices don't even have ramps or accessible washrooms? Or how many newsrooms design workflows that accommodate journalists with chronic illnesses or mobility challenges, such as flexible deadlines or adjustable workstations?



LANGUAGE AND STYLE: YOUR WORDS SHAPE PERCEPTION

Representation is not just who writes, but how we write. See Annex 1 on page 51.

BARRIERS TO ENTRY

All of the other things we are talking about here happen only if there is a space to include everyone. But journalism schools are expensive. Internships are unpaid. Job advertisements demand “fluent english.” Years of experience for junior positions. A first-generation graduate from a small town is often shut out before they even try.

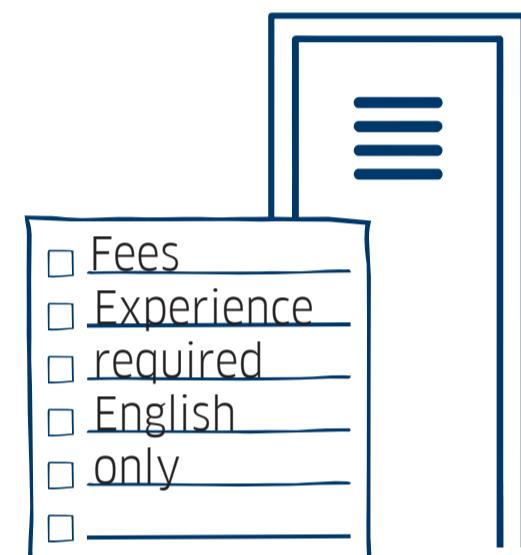


Illustration: Shivansh Srivastava

Each barrier keeps out the voices we most need. These barriers to inclusivity warrant a deep consideration and more so targeted intervention.



BEST PRACTICES TOOLBOX

Practical steps exist: fair hiring, inclusive style guides, mentorship for first-generation journalists, and regular gender sensitization workshops. A checklist in every newsroom can prevent tokenism from creeping back.

Build your own toolbox!

FUTURE VISION

Imagine a newsroom where a Dalit queer reporter edits political stories, a Muslim woman leads investigations, and disability access is part of the office design. Beyond this, they should be seen as journalists who are “all-rounders” and not just queer journalists, trans journalists, female journalists, so on and so forth. This should not be utopia, it’s what journalism should be.



Illustration: Shivansh Srivastava



Illustration: Shivansh Srivastava

CAN THE AUDIENCE HELP WITH THIS?

Audiences aren't just watching. They can guide, challenge, and expand journalism.

Audiences are more than consumers; they are partners in shaping journalism. The stories we see reflect the questions we ask, the feedback we give, and the attention we pay.

By engaging critically, readers can highlight gaps, challenge biases, and reward inclusive reporting.

When audiences hold newsrooms accountable and support inclusive journalism, they create a feedback loop that strengthens reporting for everyone, including democracy itself.



DIVERSITY IS NOT A BOX TO TICK. IT IS AN EVERYDAY PRACTICE.

As journalists, editors, and audiences, we must keep asking: whose voice is missing here? Until the answer is 'none,' the work isn't done.

Whose
voice
is missing?



Illustration: Shivansh Srivastava

ANNEXURE 1: BEST PRACTICES

CORE PRACTICES FOR REPORTING

Ask, don't assume: Check how someone wants to be named or referred to.

Gender ≠ sex:

- Sex = physical traits, usually recorded at birth.
- Gender = internal sense of self (man, woman, non-binary, etc.).
- Gender expression = how someone presents themselves (dress, voice, behaviour etc.).

Names & Pronouns: Always use the name and pronouns a person shares. Avoid 'deadnaming'. If you are not sure of someone's gender, then use gender-neutral language until confirmed. Deadnaming is referring to someone by their former name/identity, it invalidates their gender identity and can cause deep distress. Misgendering, which is using incorrect pronouns or gender terms, undermines identity and signals disrespect.

Correct terms: Transgender woman / transgender man / non-binary person. Terms to be avoided: 'transgenders', 'sex change' (say gender-affirming surgery when relevant).

Children & Youth: Use 'trans-child' or 'non-binary child' only if identity is confirmed by the child/guardian and relevant. Otherwise, use 'gender non-conforming child'.

Care & Services: Use 'gender-affirming care' for recognised medical/social support. Harmful terms: Avoid 'sexual preference' (say sexual orientation). Avoid 'alternative lifestyle'.

Queer: Use only if the person/group identifies this way themselves. Don't apply it broadly.

'Conversion therapy': Use the recognised term, but explain that these are discredited and harmful practices. Sexual Orientation Change Efforts (SOCE), or what is widely known as 'conversion therapy' or 'reparative therapy', is a discredited and pseudoscientific practice that forcibly attempts to 'change'

a person's sexual orientation or gender identity to fit heteronormative expectations. It has been widely condemned by medical bodies across the world for causing psychological harm and violating human dignity.

Don't ask intrusive questions: "When did you know you were gay?" "Have you had surgery?" "What's your real name?" Instead, ask: "Is there anything you'd like readers to understand about your experience?"

Be mindful about 'code-switching' and 'outing at work': Code-switching refers to how many queer and trans people adjust their language, tone, dress, or behaviour in different settings to avoid discrimination or to 'fit in'. Journalists should be mindful of this, recognise it as a survival strategy rather than inauthenticity. Avoid framing it negatively and instead, acknowledge the pressures that make code-switching necessary.

Revealing someone's LGBTQIA+ identity without their consent is 'outing'. This can put people at risk of stigma, harassment, or even violence. Always let the individual decide if, when, and how they want to share their identity. Never assume that because a person is open in one context (e.g., among friends), they are comfortable being out in all spaces (e.g., workplace, public platforms).

ETHICAL PRACTICES WHEN 'PARACHUTE' REPORTING

- Actively engage with local sources.
- Ensure diverse voices are represented.
- Avoid story treatment as just another assignment.
- Get in touch with local journalists and get insights, ideas and context necessary for in-depth reporting.
- Ensure your and your reporters' legal and physical safety and security on ground.

GENDER GLOSSARY FOR JOURNALISTS/NEWSROOMS

Term	What it means	Safe use
Deadnaming	Using a trans person's birth name instead of their chosen name.	Always use the person's chosen name unless they explicitly say otherwise. Avoid publishing birth names.
Misgendering	Referring to someone with incorrect pronouns or gendered terms.	Ask sources for their pronouns and respect them. If unsure, use neutral language until clarified.
Cisgender	A person whose gender identity matches the sex assigned at birth.	Use to explain privilege or context, but don't label unless relevant and accurate.
Non-binary	Identities outside the male/female binary.	Respect the terms people use for themselves. Use gender-neutral pronouns and avoid framing non-binary as 'new' or a 'trend'.
Transgender (or Trans)	People whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex at birth.	Use 'trans' as an adjective, not a noun (say 'trans people', not 'transgenders'). Only mention if relevant to the story.
Intersex	People born with physical sex traits that don't fit typical definitions of male or female.	Avoid sensationalizing. Use 'intersex' only if the person self-identifies and it's relevant.
Gender Dysphoria	Distress that can occur when gender identity doesn't align with assigned sex or societal expectations.	Use medical terms responsibly; don't pathologize trans people. Focus on lived experiences, not diagnoses.
Cisnormativity	Assuming everyone is cisgender by default.	Be mindful in reporting - don't assume pronouns or identities. Check before describing.
Gender Policing	Enforcing stereotypes of how a gender should 'look' or 'act'.	Challenge stereotypes in your writing. Don't frame people as 'failing' or 'passing' for a gender.
Pronouns	Words like she/her, he/him, they/them, ze/zir, etc.	Always confirm a source's pronouns before publishing. If unavailable, use neutral language (e.g., "the reporter said...").
Gender Identity	A person's internal sense of their own gender (e.g., man, woman, non-binary, genderqueer).	Use the term someone identifies with. Don't conflate identity with biology.

Term	What it means	Safe use
Gender Expression	How someone presents their gender through clothing, voice, mannerisms, etc.	Don't assume identity from expression; describe factually if relevant.
Assigned Sex at Birth	The sex (male/female/intersex) recorded on someone's birth certificate.	If necessary, phrase as 'assigned male/female at birth' instead of 'biologically male/female'.
Outing	Revealing someone's gender identity or sexual orientation without their consent.	Never out someone. Always check if identity details are on the record.
Transition	The social, legal, and/or medical steps a person may take to live as their true gender	Respect privacy. Don't ask invasive questions about surgery or someone's body unless the source brings it up and it's relevant.
Invisible Disabilities	Disabilities that are not immediately visible, such as chronic illnesses, neurodivergence, or mental health conditions.	Don't assume someone is non-disabled because you can't 'see' a disability. Let sources define how (or if) their disability is described. Avoid ableist language like 'confined to a wheelchair' or 'suffers from'.
Unconscious Bias	Attitudes or stereotypes about gender (or other identities) that people hold without realizing it.	Reflect on word choice, framing, and sourcing. Ask: Am I defaulting to stereotypes? Am I only quoting men? Am I assuming cisgender by default?
	Examples of unconscious bias in everyday life:	<p>A cisgender female colleague says to a queer man (who is dressed in 'male' clothing but may identify as gender-fluid or experience dysphoria): "Oh, you're a man - too bad you can't wear dresses like these on a hot summer day like this."</p> <p>Giving promotions to certain people because they are 'clever' when in fact it is because of their privilege and caste background. Or forming a group of only some people and calling it a 'close-knit' group.</p>

ANNEXURE 2: GAME

GAME 1: MEDIA TRUST BINGO

Clicked a headline that didn't match the story.	Checked 2+ sources before sharing an article.	Shared a news story with an added opinion.	Paid for a digital news subscription.	Fact-checked an image/video before trusting it.
Corrected misinformation shared by a friend.	Read a story that included diverse viewpoints.	Saw a story retracted/corrected publicly.	Only read the headline, not the full article.	Engaged in a respectful debate about the news.
Saw invasive ads blocking the article text.	Read a neutral explainer on a complex topic.	Read news today.	Followed a journalist, not just a news outlet.	Clicked on a story based only on the photo.
Unfollowed a biased news source.	Cited a news source in a real-life conversation.	Reported a piece of content as misinformation.	Searched for the original source of a quote.	Used emotional language when sharing news.
Confirmed the author's credentials/expertise.	Clicked an article with clear editorial bias.	Ignored the 'comments' section on a news story.	Read a correction/apology from a news outlet.	Shared a story you hadn't fully read.

GAME 2: INCLUSION BLIND SPOT

Journalist Profile (Identity & Situation)	A. Physical Accessibility Barrier	B. Invisible Disability/ Health Barrier	C. Identity/ Bias Barrier (Tokenism)	D. Cost/ Class Barrier (Unpaid Internships)	None
A first-generation college graduate who needs to accept an unpaid internship to get a start.					
A wheelchair user whose newsroom is on the third floor with only stairs and no ramp.					
A reporter who struggles navigating and processing information in loud, fast-paced editorial meetings.					
A queer Muslim journalist who is only assigned stories related to communal or LGBTQIA+ issues.					
A reporter with chronic fatigue syndrome needing flexible work hours and adjusted deadlines.					
A journalist from a small town whose regional accent is often the subject of office jokes.					
A trans reporter who is repeatedly misgendered by a veteran editor.					
A Dalit woman reporter who is left out of informal networking groups and office meetings.					

HOW THE GAME WORKS

- For each of the 8 journalist profiles, you must determine which of the 4 barrier categories apply to their situation.
- You place a checkmark in the columns (A, B, C, or D) that represents a likely or explicit barrier for that specific journalist. Since identities are often intersectional, you will typically place multiple checks per row.
- Scoring: You get 1 point for every correct checkmark you made.
- Your total score determines your inclusion awareness status (e.g., 'newsroom star', 'getting there', or 'time to revisit'), reflecting how well you recognize the complex, multi-layered challenges to diversity and inclusion discussed in the chapter.

WHY REPRESENTATIVE REPORTING MATTERS

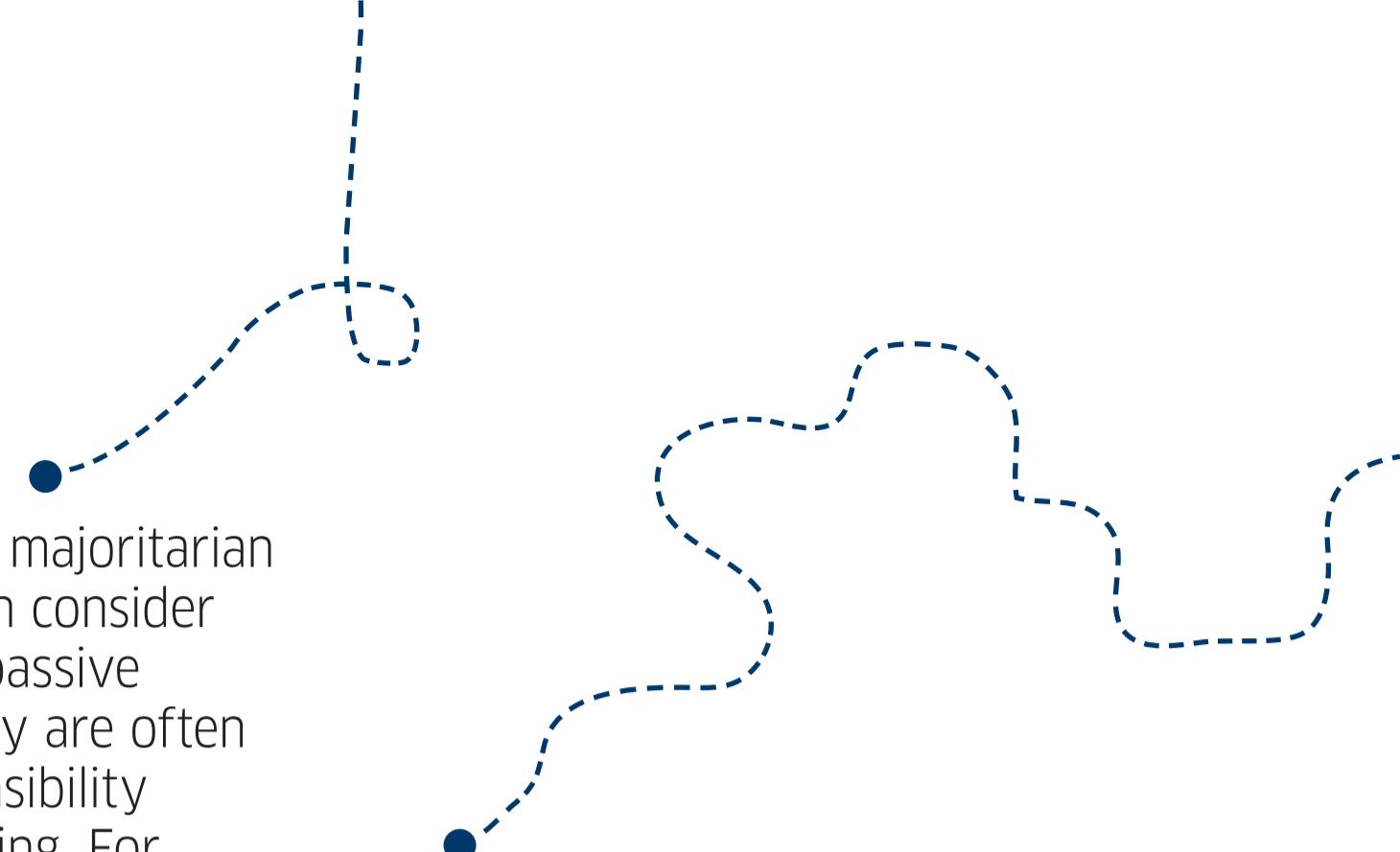
Representative reporting refers to realistic reporting of the society offering a perspective into lesser noticed or invisible parts of our society. This operates in different ways across the world.

In Germany's recent history of unity after the Cold War, there has also been a general and stereotypical coverage of East Germany, formerly DDR states. Furthermore, 18.1 million people have a history of migration, which makes diasporic communities a crucial part of Germany's society. The biggest community is the Turkish diaspora living in Germany for almost four generations. But there are also many other diasporas living in Germany (e.g. Iranian, Kurdish, Syrian, Afghan, Sri Lankan Tamils).

Realistic reporting here must include people's realities, stories and perspectives.

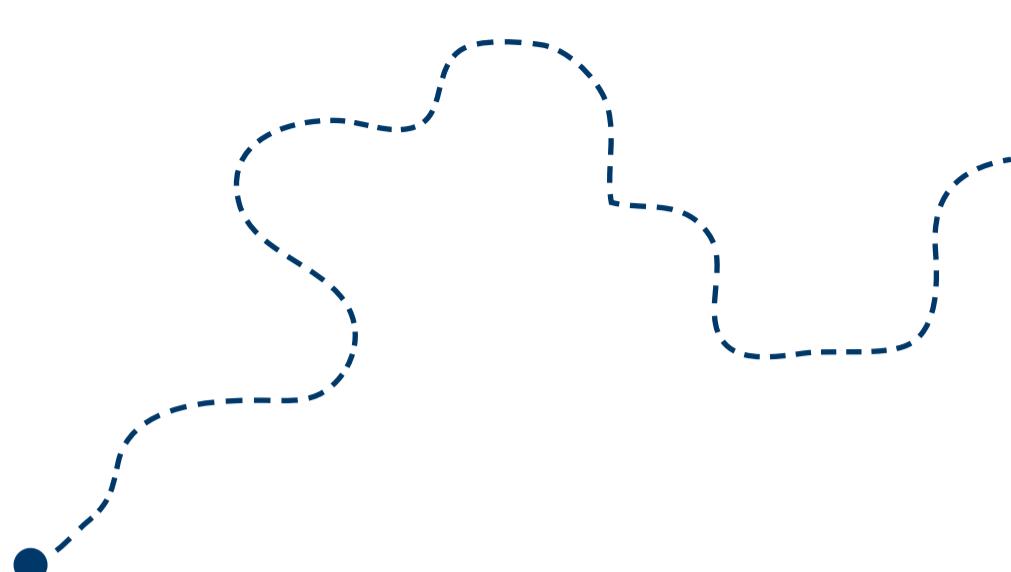
In India, the media is predominantly based out of New Delhi, which is the capital city of the country. This also means that funds and resources are centered in and around Delhi, making it nearly impossible for regional media to compete. The worst-affected regions are north-east parts of India.

This chapter outlines two examples – diaspora representation and regional journalism – to emphasise the importance of holistic journalism that takes into account diversity, including but not limited to languages, cultures and regional characteristics. We also discuss how to diversify our reportage instead of monopolising the field. We discuss hyperlocal journalism as a possible way to fill the vacuum of information pertaining to certain groups or areas.



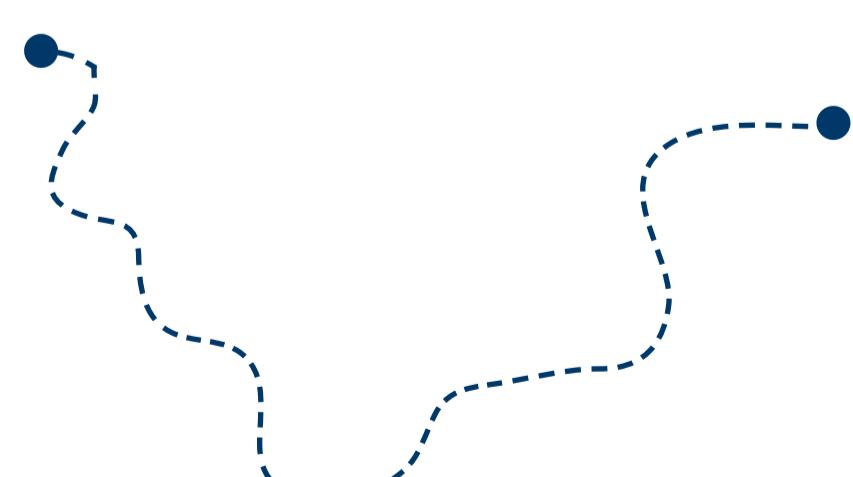
Stories that focus on the majoritarian section of a society often consider the minority section as passive players, when in fact they are often imposed with the responsibility of keeping the cogs moving. For instance, diaspora communities are seen as nurses, sanitation workers, factory workers, and other informal labour groups, which are crucial in building and maintaining the society. This reality has changed over the years. After decades in Germany, diasporic families have academics, professionals in different careers, which means holding on to the prior imagery is problematic and stereotypical.

Representative reporting here becomes crucial to combat stereotypes and reiterate the fact that migration is a part of Germany, and any other country. It is a much more complex subject than it being a 'threat of infiltration'.



Migration is not seen for its complexity but rather in a simplified and one dimensional manner. It is a reality that has been a part of Germany for so long. From coverage to dialogue, diaspora communities carry unique perspectives, histories, and challenges, and including these voices enriches reporting and prevents one-dimensional storytelling. It is also important to normalize their existence and presence in society.

This will not happen overnight without consistent engagement with the community, that fosters credible and long-term relationships, making reporting more authentic.



Journalists should seek sustained involvement rather than parachute coverage. A consistent coverage of diaspora perspectives also expands trust in media. Diaspora communities must be accurately represented in media, with inclusion of their perspectives and visibility of representation.

EAST GERMANY:

WHY THE COVERAGE GAP EXISTS

Over three decades after reunification, East Germany still struggles with how it's portrayed in the media. The region is frequently framed through narrow lenses - economic decline, depopulation, and the rise of right-wing politics - which distorts perceptions and neglects the everyday realities of life there.

STRUCTURAL IMBALANCE

Most national newsrooms are located in Western cities like Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, or Munich. Decision-makers and editors often lack personal connections to the East, reinforcing a 'West German gaze' that filters stories through external assumptions rather than local perspectives.

HISTORICAL LEGACIES

Following reunification, East Germany underwent sweeping social and economic changes. However, reporting often stayed anchored to narratives of loss and crisis, ignoring stories of resilience, innovation, and cultural richness. This imbalance fuels mistrust toward mainstream media among Eastern communities.

PERSISTENT STEREOTYPES- ESPECIALLY RIGHT-WING LABELING

East Germans are frequently cast collectively as a political threat, often associated with right-wing extremism, socioeconomic marginalization, and negative behaviors. These stereotypes have persisted across traditional media and social media platforms, reinforcing divisive narratives.

WHY BALANCED REPORTING IS CRUCIAL

The reality is much more textured:

- Young people in East-German cities like Leipzig and Dresden are launching startups and cultural initiatives.
- Renewable energy projects are transforming rural areas.
- Migration is adding diversity to regional life.
- Local activism and traditions continue to thrive.

A more nuanced portrayal, not just for accuracy, but to move past cliches and oversimplification is vital to rebuild trust between the media and East German audiences.

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES •----- IN INDIA

Regional perspectives in India are not just about language accessibility but also about power. The dominance of Hindi and English in national media often sidelines other linguistic and cultural contexts, while caste continues to shape who gets to tell stories and whose stories are told. This is why hyperlocal coverage becomes critical.

Outlets like *Khabar Lahariya* and *Gaon Connection* have shown how grassroots journalism can shift narratives by centering communities in their own voices and idioms.

Also, the demand for regional-language content is undeniable but for journalists, it means adapting newsroom practices to ensure reporting is rooted in local contexts, building trust where representation has long been absent, and treating regional audiences as central to the national conversation rather than peripheral. Further, local languages are more accessible than English, and helps build trust and relevance as rural communities feel included and represented.

There is also an opportunity for digital growth, as rural and semi-urban populations are eager to use the internet as a source of information. Regional languages are a crucial part of their communication, there is demand for content in regional languages. 70% of internet users in India prefer content in their regional language, and according to Google-KPMG report¹⁹, 9 out of 10 new internet users in the next 5 years are likely to be an Indian language user.

-----• EXISTING BEST PRACTICES

MIGRATÖCHTER (SWR)²⁰: ***“IMMIGRANT DAUGHTERS”***

A community oriented format on Instagram by the German public broadcast, centering perspectives from first or second generation immigrants and their realities in Germany.

KARAKAYA TALKS²¹ (INDEPENDENT):

Karakaya Talks is an independent news channel by Esra Karakaya. Formerly produced by the public German broadcast (*Funk/WDR*) Esra and her team provide alternative access to news regarding communities. Their target groups are people of color from the Gen Z and Millennial generations.

DATTELTÄTER (FUNK)²²: ***“DATE PERPETATOR”***

Die Datteltäter are a satirical group from Berlin that is mainly active on YouTube and Instagram. Their videos primarily focus on the lives of Muslims in Germany and the prejudices they face. They have been part of the public broadcaster *Funk* since 2016.

WDR COSMO²³:

WDR Cosmo is a diversity-centering online and radio format of the Western German broadcast. It has online sliders, reels and podcasts centered around topics of immigrant, diaspora and other perspectives, empowering and informing a broader audience that sees diversity as a vital part of Germany’s society.

DO'S AND DON'TS FOR COVERING VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

DO

- Respect cultural sensitivity.
- Use community's own words.
- Involve members in storytelling.
- Highlight agency and resilience.
- Constructive coverage and solution-oriented coverage.
- Fact-check and debunk formats when it comes to stereotypical assumptions when covering marginalised communities.
- Pay attention to the local details and the importance of cultural identities.

DON'T

- Stereotyping.
- Portraying minorities as victims.
- Crisis-only focus.
- Treating regional subjects as inferiors.

The **TRUST TOOLBOX**

A MULTIMEDIA GUIDE TO IMMERSIVE STORYTELLING



EPISODE 1: MULTIPLE SOURCING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Synopsis:

Credibility is a very valuable possession for journalism in the new media ecosystem where headlines are fleeting and sources are abundant.

Here we shed some light on how trust is never granted by a single authority but rather established by clear multilayered verification procedures. According to the

empirical research in 2025 provided by the Reuters Institute, in some of the markets, only 31 per cent of the users choose to watch news through a video; however, use of video content is growing steadily.

We will take you through practical techniques of doing so- split-screen interviewing and built in stakeholder audio, as well as interactive geospatial visualizations filled with verified data points. By doing so, you will turn time spent by the audience on your story into long-term trust.

If you want to watch the full episode, please scan the QR code.



EPISODE 2: INTERACTIVE CITATIONS & DATA VERIFICATION

Synopsis:

Long gone are the days when it was sufficient to have your source verified. Modern people are seeking openness and facts, rather than promises. According to empirical research by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism in 2025, 55 percent of the interviewees around the globe still favor text-based news, 31 percent favor visual and 15 percent audio formats, thus supporting a clearly quantifiable change in the preferred medium of consuming news.

You will also know how to make footnote citations into interactive graphics, clickable visualizations, data visualizations optimized to mobile and brief video explanations of facts in this module. By letting your audience directly, literally, click over to evidence, you encourage an interest and more importantly promote earned trust and not assumed trust.

If you want to watch the full episode, please scan the QR code.



EPISODE 3: TRANSPARENT AI- THE ETHICS OF DISCLOSURE

Synopsis:

Artificial intelligence is becoming part of many newsrooms, but it does not inspire confidence and trust yet. According to a 2024 report by the Reuters Institute, half of all the people in the United States and two-thirds of the people in the United Kingdom will be uncomfortable with news production being controlled by artificial intelligence.

This episode is a tour of the AI visual ethics of disclosure: labeling AI-generated images and text, showing before/after cases and explaining why machine-assisted storytelling is a thing. Instead of discouraging audiences with information about what a story has, the goal is transparency that will reassure the viewer about how the story was built.

If you want to watch the full episode, please scan the QR code.



EPISODE 4: ENGAGEMENT THROUGH ENTERTAINMENT- THE POWER OF HUMAN STORIES

Synopsis:

Engagement is no longer optional - it's imperative. The Reuters Institute reports that news "consumers prefer visual verification over long text," and that global trust in news remains stuck at around 40 percent²⁴. In this finale, we show how serious journalism can be compelling, not just credible. Through mini-documentaries, animations, and interactive quizzes, you'll learn how to bring human experience into the frame - transforming passive readers into active participants. When viewers feel your story, they stay - and they trust.

If you want to watch the full episode, please scan the QR code.



LOOKING TOWARDS

SOLUTIONS:

TECH AND

TRUST

**UTILISING TECHNOLOGY
TO OUR ADVANTAGE**



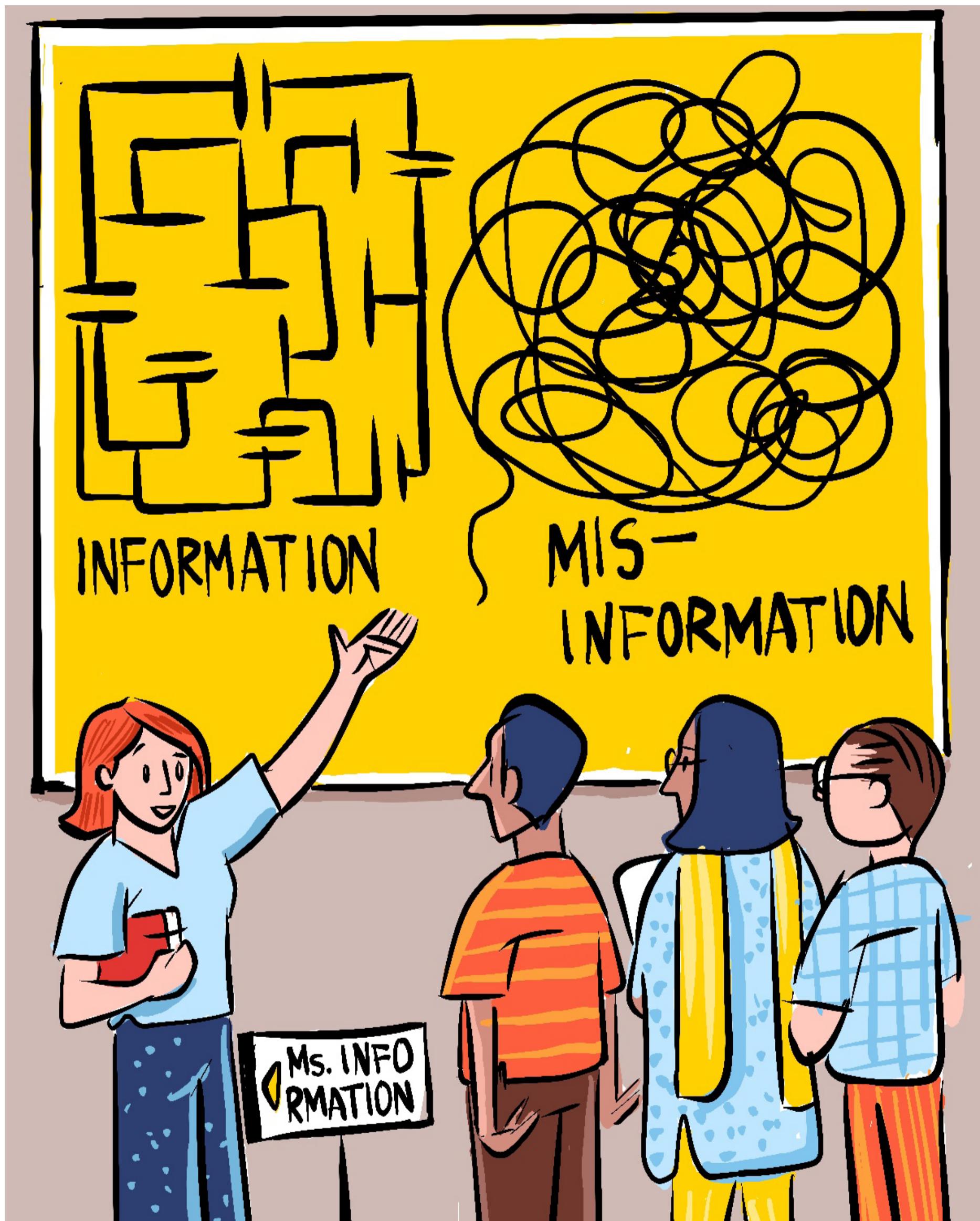


Illustration: Satwik Gade

MIS-/DISINFORMATION

With the rise of AI tools and social media, misinformation and disinformation can spread faster than ever before. In three short videos, we explain how you can recognize false information and how simple tools and AI can help you detect it.



BASIC FACT CHECKING

How can I find out if a photo or video on the internet has been taken out of context? You can find out using the tools explained in the video tutorial.



CHATGPT FOR NEWSROOMS

ChatGPT can generate disinformation in no time at all—but can it also be a fact checker? We show you how in this video tutorial.



HOW TO DETECT AI CONTENT

More and more AI content is appearing on the internet. Here's how to find out if photos and videos are real.



Illustration: Satwik Gade

ETHICAL USE OF AI

1 NEVER TRUST AI BLINDLY

Every output must be verified and cross-checked with independent research. A human has to be in the loop before anything gets published.

2 USE AI WHERE IT FITS

Current systems still write in a generic style, but they excel at other tasks, like analyzing large datasets, summarizing extensive documents and more.

3 TRANSPARENCY IN DISCLOSURE

Not every AI-assisted step requires labeling. However, if an entire text is generated solely by AI, this must be clearly disclosed.

4 UNDERSTAND ALGORITHMIC BIAS

AI systems inherit bias from their training data, often smoothing over controversial issues and reflecting a Western-centric worldview.

5 PROTECT SENSITIVE DATA

Confidential sources should never be entered into non-enterprise AI tools and in some cases, not into AI at all.

6 RECOGNIZE DEPENDENCIES

Outsourcing major parts of research and workflows to AI shifts control over journalistic processes and data to external providers, mostly private companies.

7 COMMIT TO CONTINUOUS TRAINING

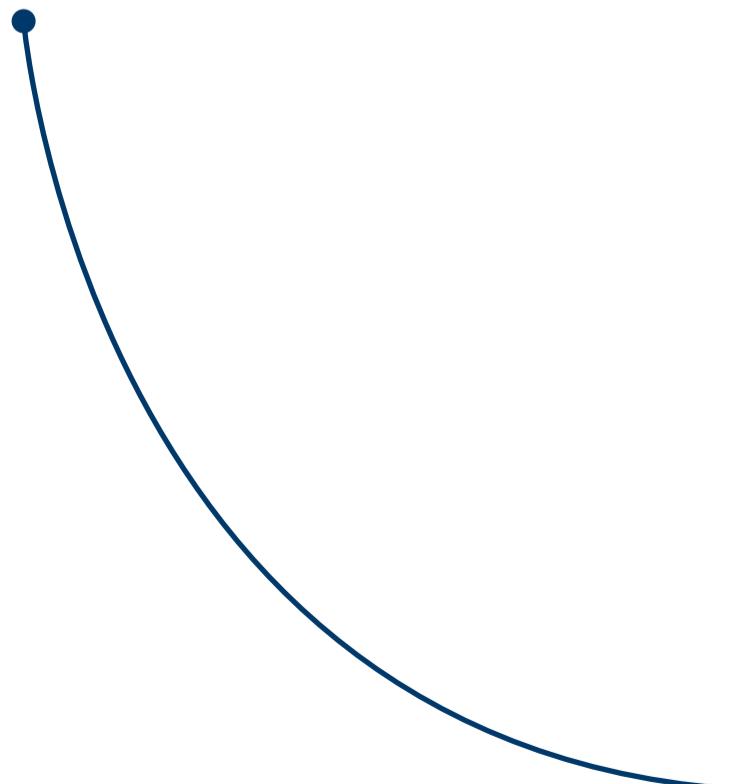
Journalists should be encouraged to practice prompting on their own, but also need structured, regular training to stay ahead of developments.

WHEN YOU DON'T NEED TO TELL YOUR AUDIENCE YOU USED AI

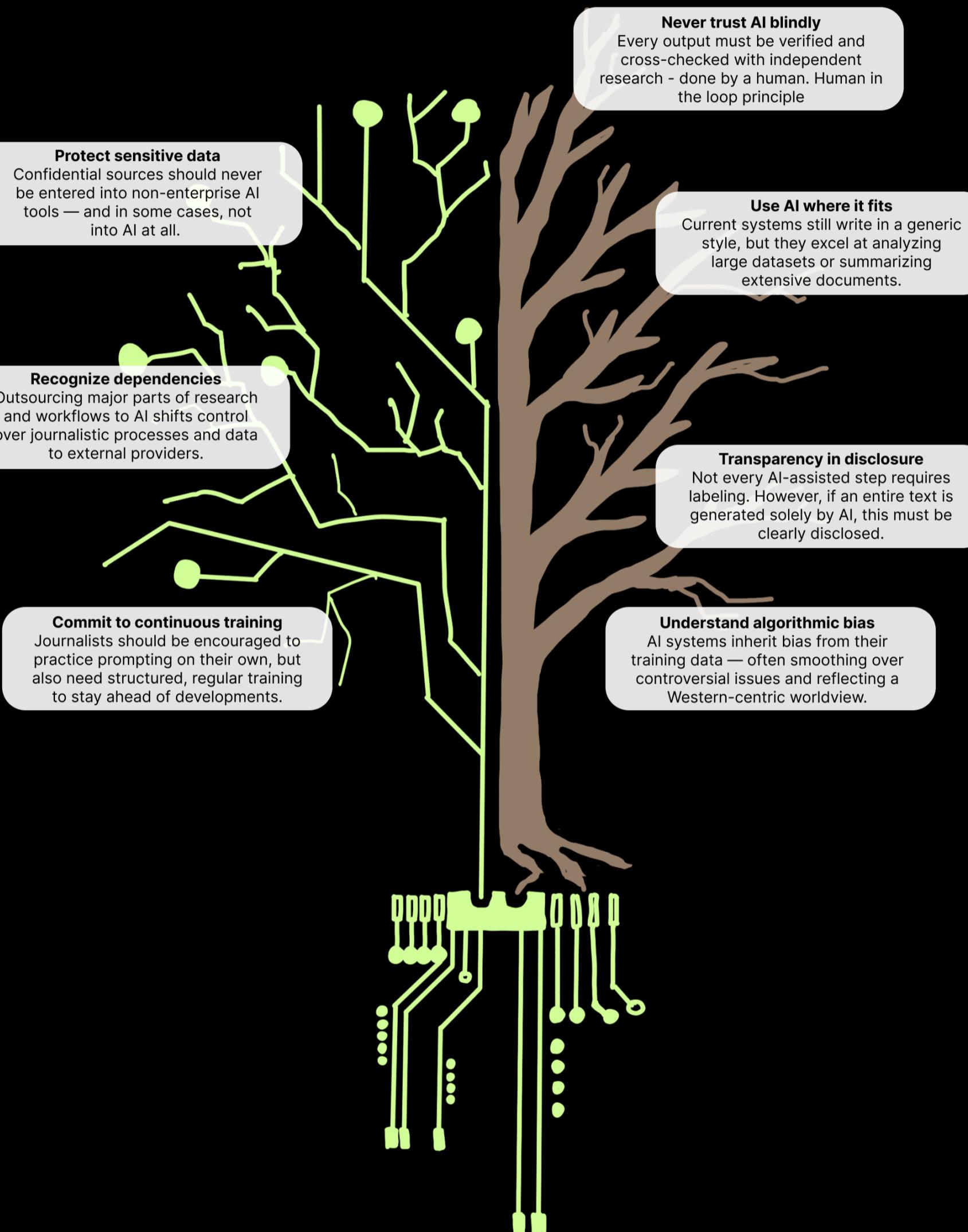
- Research with AI chatbots.
- Basic photo and video editing with functions that are integrated into editing software (e.g. cropping, color correction).
- Basic audio edits (e.g. noise level reduction).
- Generating SEO-optimized titles and teasers (so long as they are checked by an editor before publication).
- Proofreading of grammatical mistakes and spell-check.

WHEN TO TELL YOUR AUDIENCE YOU USED AI

- When AI helped write or translate your story.
- When AI analyzed or labeled data you reported on before publication.
- When visuals, audio, or quotes were AI-generated.



ETHICAL USE OF AI IN NEWSROOMS



hiccuped

Illustration: Sharanya Eshwar



Quiz: HOW GOOD ARE YOU AT JOURNO AI?

Scenario 1

You're on deadline. An AI tool generates a full draft of a news story based on a press release. What should you do?

- A) Publish it, since it saves time.
- B) Edit lightly and publish.
- C) Verify facts independently, rewrite in your own words, and disclose if AI helped.
- D) Skip it, AI shouldn't be used for drafting at all.

Scenario 2

A colleague proposes generating an AI image to illustrate a climate story. The image looks realistic but is entirely synthetic. How do you proceed?

- A) Publish without mention (audience won't know).
- B) Publish but add a disclaimer "AI-assisted."
- C) Only publish if it's clearly labeled as AI-generated, and no real photo could serve.
- D) Never publish AI visuals.

Self-check Question:

List two newsroom tasks where AI can be used safely without misleading readers.

Scenario 4

A politician claims unemployment has dropped by 20% in the past year. What's your first move?

- A) Quote it directly ("The minister said unemployment dropped by 20%").
- B) Check the latest official statistics from the labor ministry or independent data.
- C) See how other media covered it.
- D) Use AI to summarize past reports.

Scenario 5

You receive a viral video on WhatsApp showing alleged police violence. What's the correct verification step?

- A) Share on social media, labeling it "unconfirmed".
- B) Use reverse image/video search to check origin, confirm date and location.
- C) Ask a colleague if they've seen it before.
- D) Use AI to generate a summary of reactions.

Scenario 6

Which of the following are red flags when fact-checking? (Pick all that apply)

- A) Missing publication date.
- B) Anonymous source with no context.
- C) Claims backed by primary documents.
- D) Image metadata showing a different date/location.

Scenario 7

You're using an LLM to get a brief overview of a current topic that's outside your specialization. How do you make sure the presented facts are correct? (Pick all that apply)

- A) Use Google Gemini since it tends to be more reliable with news topics than other LLMs.
- B) Ask the LLM to actually cite quotes and check their origins on your own afterwards.
- C) Never research current topics with an LLM.
- D) Ask the LLM to fact-check the information it provided.

Scenario 8

In which topics are LLMs most reliable?

- A) Events from the past, since they are well-researched and many different sources have contributed to the training data of LLMs.
- B) Breaking news, since current reporting immediately overwrites old sources in the training material of LLMs.

Scenario 9

You see what appears to be a clip from a politician's press conference on Instagram, in which they make a highly controversial statement. How can you make sure the video hasn't been altered or created with AI?

- A) Instagram does not allow uploads of AI-generated content.
- B) Look for the watermark that every AI video automatically receives.
- C) Share the video to gather more opinions from friends.
- D) Check the uploader, search for the original source of the appearance, and research the context.

Correct answers: 1) C (with newsroom policy allowing AI assistance); 2) C (with newsroom policy allowing AI assistance); 3) Answer examples: transcription, translation, summarization, data analysis; 4) B; 5) B; 6) A,B,D; 7) B; 8) A; 9) D



USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR TWO WAY COMMUNICATION WITH READERS

Social media is a powerful way to connect with audiences who have had little contact with journalism so far or even avoid consuming news ('news fatigue'). When journalism consistently captures attention in social feeds, it can build long-term loyalty, eventually motivating people to actively seek out the work of a particular outlet/newsroom. The key to success lies in understanding what truly interests audiences and in presenting those topics in the most effective and engaging way.

We have defined some core rules to make journalistic content on social media attractive to audiences, especially younger target groups.

CORE RULES

1 RESPECT YOUR AUDIENCE

Social media reduces complexity, but it should never infantilize. Young people care about important issues around them such as migration, defense policy, pensions, and housing just as much as traditional newspaper readers.

3 RETHINK RATHER THAN REUSE

Do not simply reuse TV reports or print analyses. Rebuild the story from scratch if necessary, or isolate one strong element that can stand on its own.

5 KNOW YOUR DEMOGRAPHIC

Social media is not exclusive to youth – people over 50 are active across nearly all social media platforms.

7 TELL IT NATURALLY

Present news the way you would explain it to a close friend: authentic, relatable, and free of unnecessary jargon.

2 ENCOURAGE INTERACTION

Polls, Q&As, and direct engagement build a sense of being seen – and they are an effective way to identify emotions and sentiments within the community.

4 AVOID GENERALIZATIONS

There is no single group called 'young people'. Values, politics, and behaviors vary widely – generalizing the group is a mistake many media organizations often have made and tend to make.

6 MEDIA TRUST IS STILL STRONG

Even influencers and so-called 'alternative media' often rely heavily on legacy outlets as their primary source material.

8 AUTHENTICITY BEATS PERFECTION

It's better to have imperfectly produced multimedia content that engages your audience rather than super polished content that keeps them at a distance.

9 MAKE IT TANGIBLE

Explain how policies or events change everyday life – laws, wars, climate change, migration costs. Break it down to the smallest possible detail of what will concretely change.

11 FINISH THE STORY

Audiences expect complete narratives within the platform. Cliffhangers that push people off-platform rarely work. However, there are exceptions to the rule – so use them rarely and wisely.

10 PLATFORM-SPECIFIC THINKING

It is not enough to 'create content for social'. Every platform has its own dynamics, target groups, and expectations that require a tailored approach.

12 FROM CURIOSITY TO COMMITMENT

Users will switch platforms or even pay for content if it satisfies a concrete need or longing. Being merely 'interesting' is not enough to move them.



Illustration: Satwik Gade

CITIZEN JOURNALISM

CAN ONLY JOURNALISTS DO JOURNALISM?

Through two case studies— one from India and one from Germany— we examine what journalism can look like and how professional journalists can help citizens and content creators draw attention to issues.

1 CASE STUDIES

Mainstream media in India prioritizes breaking news and follow-up stories, often relegating civic issues, local concerns and rural coverage to the back burner. Organizations such as Citizen Matters and The Quint have launched initiatives to train people in basic journalism skills so they can provide immediate, on-the-ground coverage and perspectives that professional journalists might miss.

The Quint, a prominent Indian digital news platform, launched 'My Report' in 2015 under their Managing Director, CEO and co-founder Ritu Kapur's leadership. The initiative provides a platform for ordinary citizens in affected areas to share stories and report on local issues ignored by mainstream media. Namita Handa, a

former editor of My Report, said the initiative enabled grassroots movements in local communities where anyone with a smartphone and social media access could document issues affecting them.

“Citizen journalism has helped democratize news to a great extent,” Handa said. “Where journalists sitting in the comfort of air-conditioned newsrooms may fail to see the importance of issues creeping into the daily lives of locals such as poor road conditions in remote areas of Faridabad or a neglected area in Delhi that’s suddenly cleaned during elections, citizen journalists affected by the issue help highlight these problems with unbridled enthusiasm.”

According to Handa, most news platforms reach out to stringers only when the news cycle makes it relevant. My Report, however, maintains a pool of citizen journalists to report on local issues regularly, building community engagement and trust as residents see a media outlet spotlight issues that mainstream media fail to prioritize.

But citizen journalism doesn't mean any anecdotal evidence can be published without scrutiny.

“It is a two-way street,” Handa said. “You help citizens raise their voice through such means, but not without editors cross-checking and verifying sources, asking them to maybe reshoot, send the right visuals and work on the audio if it feels too low, and pass on fact-checking skills.”

These initiatives make journalism accessible. When someone sees their neighbor publishing a story on such websites, they feel empowered to write and tell stories themselves, says Namita.

Another notable initiative here is the Oorvi Foundation's *Citizen Matters* platform, that combines civic journalism with community education. It brings together professional journalists and active citizens to create and publish reports, case studies, and knowledge resources that foster sustainable, equitable, and livable cities. The foundation believes citizen journalism aids constructive journalism as citizen contributors amplify community voices through firsthand experiences while developing their identities as civic problem-solvers and leaders.

“This process spreads awareness, enabling others to learn from these active citizens, start identifying issues, and drive meaningful change,” said Meera K, co-founder of Citizen Matters.

2

Funk- Germany's public broadcaster and its work with digital creators

The youth content network *Funk*, run by Germany's public broadcaster, has for several years collaborated with well-known content creators and influencers on a project-by-project basis. The creators already have large and loyal audiences, often built around content that has little to do with journalism. Before any publication, an extensive development process takes place in which topics, tone, and design are discussed together with the creators. All content is reviewed by journalists prior to release. The resulting videos and podcasts are usually not broadcasted on traditional TV, but appear instead on YouTube, Instagram, or Spotify – the platforms where young audiences spend most of their time. Often, the pieces are published on the creators' own channels, but are clearly marked as journalistic collaborations with *Funk*. Examples include educational formats (*MrWissen2Go*, *simplicissimus*), interview series (*Leroy will's wissen*), and entertainment shows (*Brave Mädchen*, *Phil Laude*).

Some of these formats have achieved remarkable reach. On his channel *MrWissen2Go*, host Mirko Drotschmann publishes news explainers and analyses of current events. As of October 2025, he has 2.3 million subscribers, with individual videos regularly reaching hundreds of thousands of views. For many viewers, his channel is a primary source for context and explanation around the news, and the comment section show that Drotschmann enjoys a high degree of credibility among his audience.

However, not every partnership succeeds. In the past, several creators have left the *Funk* network, saying that journalistic standards restricted their creative freedom. YouTuber Leeroy Matata, for instance, criticized journalistic rules preventing him from collecting donations for his interview guests. Earlier, he had faced public criticism for what some saw as a sensationalist and uncritical interview style. Similarly, the explainer channel '*simplicissimus*' left the network after two and a half years, citing a lack of flexibility within the public broadcasting system and a desire to pursue commercial partnerships.

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Illustration: Satwik Gade



goethe.de/india/journalismconnect