

Fighting Fakes – The Nordic Way



**Nordic Council
of Ministers**

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Fighting Fakes –

The Nordic Way

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Preface

**Fighting fakes
– the Nordic Way**



By Per Lundgren, Senior advisor
Culture and media, Nordic Council
of Ministers

Across the world, the “fake news” phenomenon has dominated the news and political agenda. This in many cases have resulted in people losing trust in media questioning all kinds of news and information and the channels distributing them. It is a dangerous development as our democracies build trust through dialogue, and fact based well-informed citizens.

In September 2017, a high-level experts group met in Copenhagen to discuss and advice on “fake news”. They delivered to the Nordic Council of Ministers the background information for the Nordic political position. This booklet aims to provide some of these reflections in order to widen the discussion and to provide some recommendations.

In this booklet, participants from the experts meeting are reflecting on how, quality journalism, media and information literacy, ethical standards and self-regulation, can counter the so-called “fake news”.

Words matters

Words have great impacts on us. Throughout history, a lot of conflicts were started because of words and some of them led to wars. By using the terminology “fake news”, “false news” or “alternative news”, we deteriorate our language because it makes us lose our trust in the media. When world leaders use these terms, they are in fact questioning journalism and encourage citizens not to believe in what the media and journalists are saying. Thus, facts lost its impact because they are being ignored.

Of course, we should all be critical towards the information we receive. Each word, each sentence, each image and each choice of content is selected among a huge amount of information. Facing the increasing competition, an increasing number of media outlets, the demands made on journalists and editors are increasing also. Nevertheless, we all need to step up our efforts in fighting against fakes.

This is a matter of quality, fact-checking, high ethical standards and maintaining a reliable dialogue between journalists and citizens. It is not possible to let the law to ensure reliable and credible journalism. Legislation will inevitably lead to censorship because it allows politicians to take control over journalism.

The European Commission has set up a High-Level Experts Group on “fake news”. The group is asked to provide the Commission with guidelines on how to fight against fakes. The message from the Commission is clear: there shall be no legislation. Nevertheless, some stakeholders discussed the possible labeling of online content which was considered by many other stakeholders as a slippery slope for media freedom.

In many decades in the Nordic countries, we have developed a system of self-regulation for the media and an environment of trust. However, this system would start to erode if we lower our guard to protect gender, and we need to make sure everyone in our society, especially children and youth, actively can participate in the public debate. Countering social media hate speech, and terror propaganda, and strongly protecting personal data from being illegally used by third parties, is key.

We need our political leaders to provide clear support for a sound development of social media, and unconditional support for media freedom and high quality journalism. We need to respect our ethical standards and enforce the self-regulatory system in order to rebuild trust and dialogue with citizens.

Fighting fakes – the Nordic Way, is concluded by concrete recommendations at the end of this booklet to be further discussed at UNESCO World Press Freedom Day. Thus, it helps to build a foundation for strengthening high quality journalism collaborations both in the Nordics and internationally.



**Copenhagen
experts
meeting
reflects on
"fake news"**



Summary from an
expert meeting
29th September 2017
set up by the Nordic
Council of Ministers

Tackling the “fake news” phenomenon is on top of the agenda worldwide as it poses a serious threat to press freedom and freedom of expressions. It not only spreads disinformation but also challenge the credibility of the media. For dictators and politicians who have great interest in making propaganda, “fake news” is not new, but it has been greatly enhanced by online media to have a wider impact on public debate and opinion. The society is affected as a whole.

Against this background, the “experts meeting on fake news” delivered reflections of the “fake news” phenomenon to the Nordic Council of Ministers. The meeting discussed the definition or re-definition of “fake news”, its impact on public debate, the political environment, the demand on the media, and on teaching new generations in distinguishing facts from fakes.

Regarding the definition of “fake news”, there is a general agreement among the experts, that we should all be clear and use more appropriate concepts, namely propaganda and disinformation when the discussion is about enhancing political ideologies, weaponisation of information or simply “bullshit” manufactured by the notorious business provided by the so-called “fake factories”.

Be more precise when discussing fakes

Though, we must also recognise that the spread of “fake news” most likely cannot be eradicated completely as it is used and shared by everyone in a general sense. The message from the experts must therefore mainly be understood as a reminder which has to be much more precise when discussing the phenomenon.

When talking about definition, the reflection on hate speech, threats, psychological influence in individuals were included. It has shown that there is a grey zone and confusion between the different issues at stake here. However, one must not mix up with these different issues. It is about different things, but all of them affect the societies in a similar way.

Online media, in particular, social media, are transmission channels with much less – if any – self-regulation than legacy media. They are therefore very obvious and efficient instruments for those who want to disseminate disinformation or “fake news”. Thus, social media must be held accountable.

Navigate without being manipulated

Citizens and the youth in particular shall be able to navigate through the vast amount of information

online without being manipulated. Therefore, it is of high importance to empower readers, listeners and viewers in their skills to navigate in the complicated online media landscape, detecting lies and understand when stories are based on urban legends. This skill, mostly possessed by journalist, must be dispersed in the population.

For new generations and the digital natives, the starting point for news consumption and discovering the complexity of society is social media. To understand how legacy media work, how to evaluate media and use them for self-expression is therefore a common task for the educational and the media sectors.

There are no one-size-fits-all-solutions. Websites to detect lies, cooperation among media to have sufficient resources for fact-checking and sharing information are starting to see its success. In a more direct way, "fake news" could be tackled by Media and Information Literacy that is underpinned by high quality journalism. It is important to know how to distinguish legacy media from media in general, and what to trust in particular.

Trust pluralistic and professional media

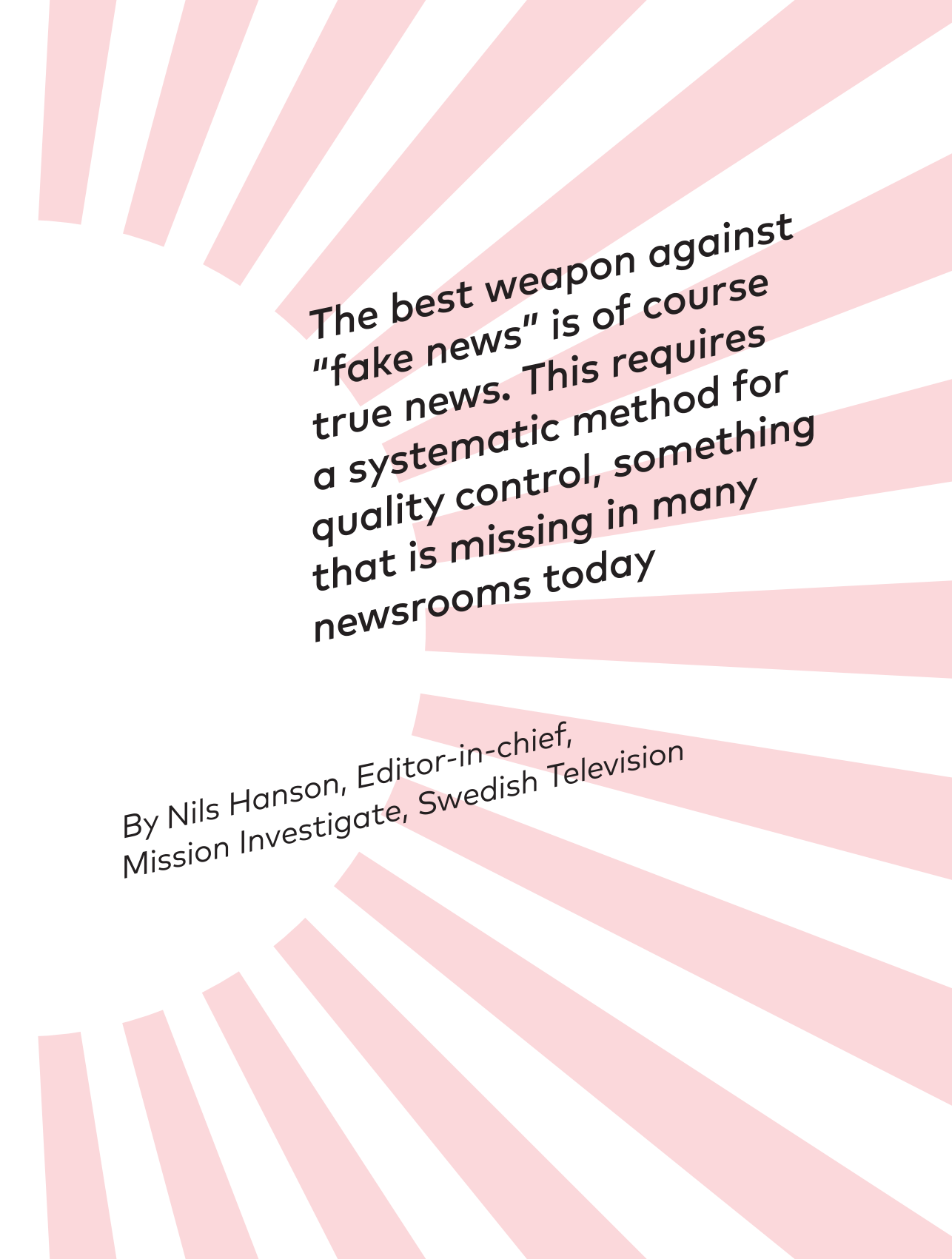
There must be trust in society. A pluralistic and professional media landscape does not have the purpose to betray as it is built upon quality. The self-regulatory system must be enabled to tackle "fake news" because any talk about legislation would immediately make people alarmed.

The distinguished experts in the meeting made recommendations for a firm support for a free and pluralistic media; for making the room for self-regulatory bodies; for making sure that the media industry is given the opportunity to take part in Media and Information Literacy training in order to empower citizens.

To counter propaganda, disinformation and the "fake news" business, some governments would be eager to develop new legislation regulating the media. Unanimously, the group of experts rejects such an approach, and gives a very clear advice on supporting a free and pluralistic media, investigative journalism and self-regulation as the best tools to uphold credibility in the media.



**True
news
against
"fake
news"**

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The best weapon against
"fake news" is of course
true news. This requires
a systematic method for
quality control, something
that is missing in many
newsrooms today

By Nils Hanson, Editor-in-chief,
Mission Investigate, Swedish Television

In other sectors of society where people can get injured by what they produced, the need for a system of quality control is obvious. For example, it is hard to imagine that an industrial company would not have a system to minimise the risks of accidents. If the accident still happens, an incident report will be written to ensure that something similar will not occur again in the future. The same applies for operations in the public sector.

However, in the media industry, there are no equivalent requirements, even though our activity can sometimes cause incurable damage. Journalism can destroy a person's reputation and ruin a company's business. People being exposed by the media may become victims of hatred and threats.

Nevertheless, quality control seems to be an unknown concept in many media houses. Spending resources on fact-checking and other efforts to make sure that the truth is presented has never been a priority in our business. It has, more or less always, been up to the reporters to make sure that their stories are accurate, fair and relevant.

In some cases, this may be understandable if not desirable in daily news journalism where speed rules. But it is totally unacceptable if journalism damages someone's reputation.

Crowd checking as a new major factor

Why has it become like this? The simple answer is: quality control has not been needed. Stories with serious errors and unfounded accusations have usually been passed unnoticed. Even if they have been criticised by media regulators, they usually let it pass without significant attention.

The public has little opportunity to intervene in our work up until now.

For someone like me, whom for 14 years has been responsible for Mission Investigate, the investigative journalism programme at the Swedish Television, this development is evident. The viewers' pressure on us has increased enormously. "Crowd checking" has become a new major factor to be taken into account.

Thanks to social media, our audience has been given tools to review and critique us. Some of them even demand influence on the editorial process. Even the slightest mistake will be exposed by ambitious "crowd checkers". Unless corrections are made immediately, more "crowd checkers" will join in to amplify the attack. Sometimes they go deeper, digging with the same research methods we are using in order to prove that we are wrong. If there is substance in the proof, it will be spread to the traditional media, which have the pleasure to attack Mission Investigate.

People in power uses journalistic tools

Meanwhile, those in power also grab the opportunity to use our journalistic tools to promote their interest. Governments and companies produce their own stories on YouTube countering our investigative stories. When we make a key interview, holding someone accountable, we are often being challenged by another TV team that is hired to put pressure on us. The message is: be fair to us, otherwise we will publish the interview first. In addition, we always, with good reasons, assume that we are being recorded with hidden equipment when making a telephone call or making an interview.

Some reporters find all these opposing efforts somewhat annoying. But I think we should welcome the resistance. In fact, it is the best thing that could happen to us because it will make us more skilled as journalists. It will improve the quality of our journalism.

Let us summarise the new demands:

- we need to be more precise in our journalism;
- we need to be more fair to those we investigate;
- we need to be more open with our working methods.

So how do we at Mission Investigate handle these demanding requirements?

Our efforts to achieve higher quality go back to 2004. Each season since then, a working group on methodology with six to eight employees representing different categories, will meet to discuss and develop the editorial guidelines. Every year, the quality control has become stronger.

The system has three control stations:

“Start meeting” is when a devil’s advocate has the task of identifying the weak link and asking critical questions. The “middle meeting” is where we ensure that the team is on the right track. Finally, nine days before the broadcast, the “line by line meeting” is where we check the facts rigorously.

Today we put more and more efforts into discussing the general picture we are giving in our stories. The facts might be correct, but we can still give a misleading picture. At each checkpoint we discuss the selection of facts, documents, experts and sources. Would the viewers be disappointed if they knew what we have left out? Can we defend the selection without risking losing credibility?

The final fact-checking process is a full day operation. Two editors together with the team review the script. All facts must be verified even if they seem insignificant. We examine the conclusions carefully. They may be sharpened or perhaps they need to be softened.

Our intention is to be as fair as possible, giving the individual in question sufficient opportunities to comment

even if he or she initially declines. We try to highlight relevant mitigating circumstances, speaking for "the bad guy".

Keep in touch with sources and audience

We have a "no surprise"-policy which means that we inform the individual not only about the allegations but also as much as possible about the script and the evidence we intend to publish. We see the individual in question as a kind of a partner when it comes to fact-checking.

In order to meet the growing demands for transparency, a reporter has to work full time to keep in touch with our audience on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. All reporters and editors are expected to be active in social media. We publish Q&A to explain controversial methods we used. Each week, we publish the complete script of the programme with links to the documents we used. We have developed our "tip service", which now includes everything from encrypted email and sms to the old-fashioned telephone tip line. This results in over 10 000 tips a year.

This is our way of trying to live up to the new demands in an era where investigative journalism is making more impact than ever.

Today more and more media houses in Sweden, big and small, realises the commercial power of investigative journalism. And this is the best way to get what the public is willing to pay for – great stories that are both exclusive and important.

Investigative journalism is finally organised from the top, instead of being depending on the initiatives of individual reporters.

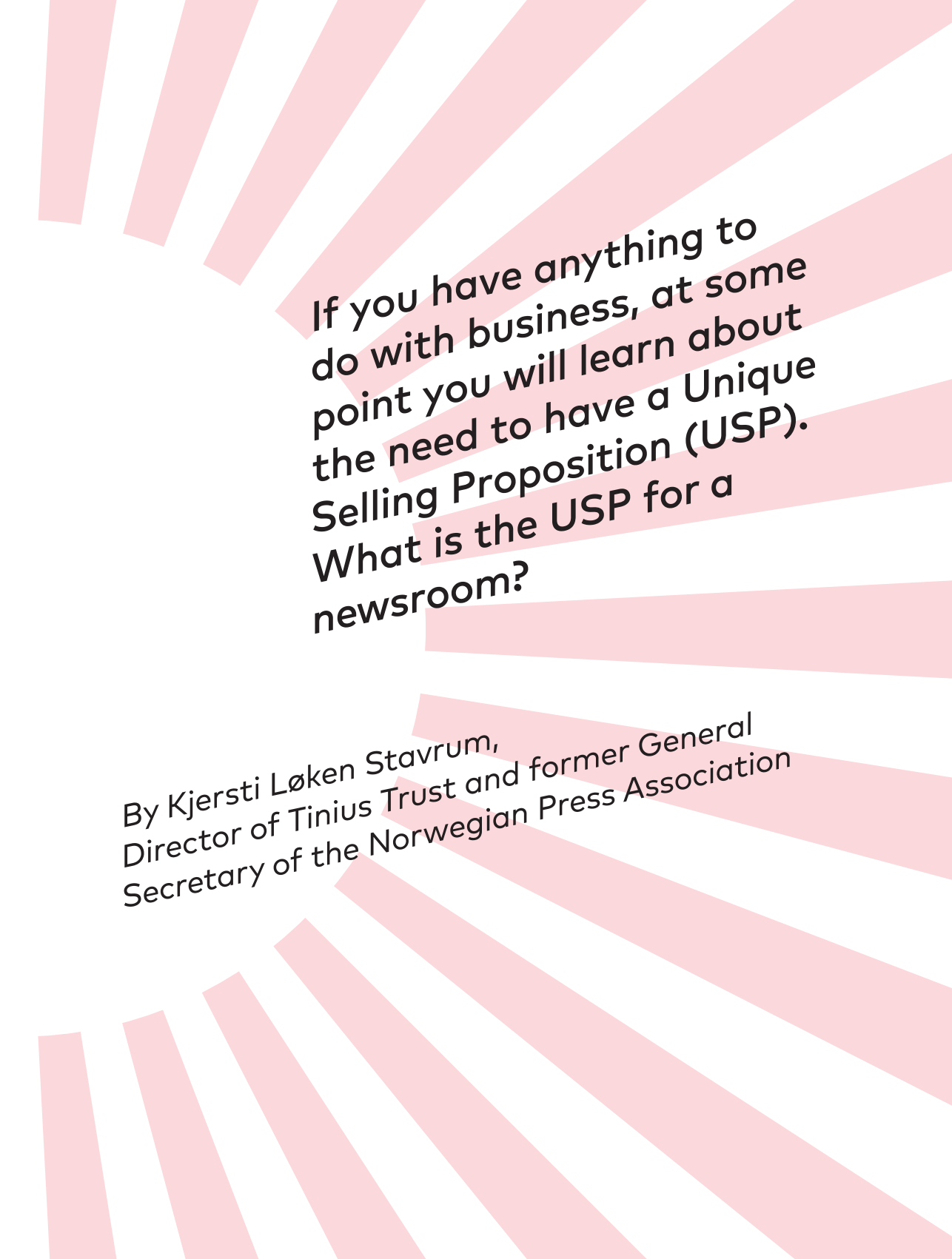
Now editors in many newsrooms have to take the next step to create a system of quality control.

It is simply a question of survival because the public will accept no less.

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Ethics

**The media's
Unique Selling
Proposition**



If you have anything to do with business, at some point you will learn about the need to have a Unique Selling Proposition (USP). What is the USP for a newsroom?

**By Kjersti Løken Stavrum,
Director of Tinius Trust and former General
Secretary of the Norwegian Press Association**

"Women over 65 years write very rude things on the internet." This somewhat surprising headline in Svenska Dagbladet was also the conclusion after one year of work by the Swedish network for research on hate on the internet, Nätverket Näthatsgranskaren. They too were surprised by this finding. Their best explanation was that these women are the true victims of "fake news". They are not accustomed to fake journalism-like content, they are not trained in investigating the sources and, they believe in what they read.

How can professional media sustain and build this crucial trust among their readers without letting "fake news" diluting their position? I think this is where journalism ethics as a Unique Selling Proposition(USP) has a part to play.

A USP is what your business represents. It is usually defined as a factor or consideration presented by a seller as the reason that one product or service is different from and better than that of the competitors. The Entrepreneur puts it as indisputable as this:

Before you can begin to sell your product or service to anyone, you have to sell it to yourself. This is particularly important when your product or service is similar to those offered around you.

As commented in an article on USP by The Economist; "Uniqueness is rare, and coming up with a continuous stream of products with unique features is, in practice, extremely difficult."

However, at a time when propaganda, misinformation, "fake news" and not least an increasing distrust in the established media in many countries, professional journalists should not be hesitant in communicating what they represent, what makes them professional and trustworthy. Can we apply business and public relations theory with the need for a USP in the newsroom?

Need of more willingness to correct

Across the newsrooms globally, there is little willingness among journalists to be transparent on journalistic considerations and the production processes before publishing a story. Neither do we have the willingness to correct errors promptly if we have to be honest to ourselves.

Katharine Graham, in the book *Personal History* touches upon this issue and the dilemmas of errors, corrections and trust. She quoted her husband Phil Graham's speech given at the University of Michigan in 1948 when he was the publisher at the Washington Post:

The necessary haste with which we operate in the production of a daily newspaper at times leads us, despite our best care, into unavoidable errors. Critics often read into these errors entirely nonexistent malice, magnifying them as further evidence of our sins. Responsible newspapers stand ready to correct any errors as zealously as they avoid committing them (page 185).

In November 2017, Katherine Viner, the editor-in-chief in the Guardian, published an important and highly debatable essay on "A mission for journalism in a time of crisis". Here she also wrote on the issue of trust:

Trust in all kinds of established institutions – including the media – is at an historic low. This is not a blip, and it should not be a surprise, when so many institutions have failed the people who trusted them and responded to criticism with contempt. As a result, people feel outraged but powerless – nothing they do seems to stop these things happening, and nobody seems to be listening to their stories.

This has created a crisis for public life, and particularly for the press, which risks becoming wholly part of the same establishment that the public no longer trusts. At a moment when people are losing faith in their ability to participate in politics and make themselves heard, the

media can play a critical role in reversing that sense of alienation.

Viner thinks it is time to rethink the role of journalists as someone who helps people, and that "journalists must work to earn the trust of those they aim to serve".

She leaves it open for readers to figure out how one can earn trust.

While the media business at large seems unpleasantly aware of the need to build trust, one is less clear on how and not so keen on sticking to a vocal promise of why they are to be trusted and how the readers could hold them to account if they fail.

Leveson inquiry showed the risk of the lack of self-regulation

A few weeks after Viner's essay, the Guardian in February 2018 made a podcast in their series "We need to talk about..." on the future of journalism. Here the readers could pose questions to Viner, and one of them naturally pointed at the need to put media to account especially after the euro-myths that were presented to the public by the so-called establishment media prior to the referendum on Brexit.

But after the phone hacking scandal and the subsequent Leveson inquiry, it once again became obvious that the British media lacks a legitimate and well-functioning self-regulatory body. This is a challenge that is yet to be solved.

The contrast to the Nordic situation is striking. This can be illustrated in a recent example. The biggest commercial TV station in Norway, TV 2, recently run some stories on Russian-Norwegian relationships based on open sources obtained from the Norwegian Police Secu-

rity Service which is concerned by Russian espionage. The Russian Embassy in Oslo has widely protested against the coverage both on Facebook and their homepage accusing TV 2 and the reporter of "delivering disinformation intended to discredit neighbourly relations ..." and "contributing to the atmosphere of generalised fear" and that this is "third-rate propaganda ... intended to incite hatred of our country".

In an e-mail sent to the media organisations on the matter, the editor-in-chief of TV 2, Olav Sandnes, suggested that the Russian Embassy should bring the case and their accusation forward to the Norwegian Press Council. This response demonstrated the willingness of TV 2 to take accountability by presenting a means of accountability to the unsatisfied complainant.

Ethical principles make a difference

Just to state the obvious: there is a huge difference on the question of trust between the establishment media on those who are not. The difference is whether the media adhere to communicated, established ethical principles and a system requiring compliance to these principles. Today, most of the Nordic countries have established press complaint bodies despite the fact they have different structures and compositions, as well as whom these should adhere to the codes of conduct.

Countering accusations of disinformation by being able to refer to an established (the Norwegian system is almost 100 years' old and often being referred to as a good example for many newly established press councils worldwide), well-structured and organised system for dealing with complaints against the media, is an advantage to the Norwegian newsrooms, the public and complainants in many ways:

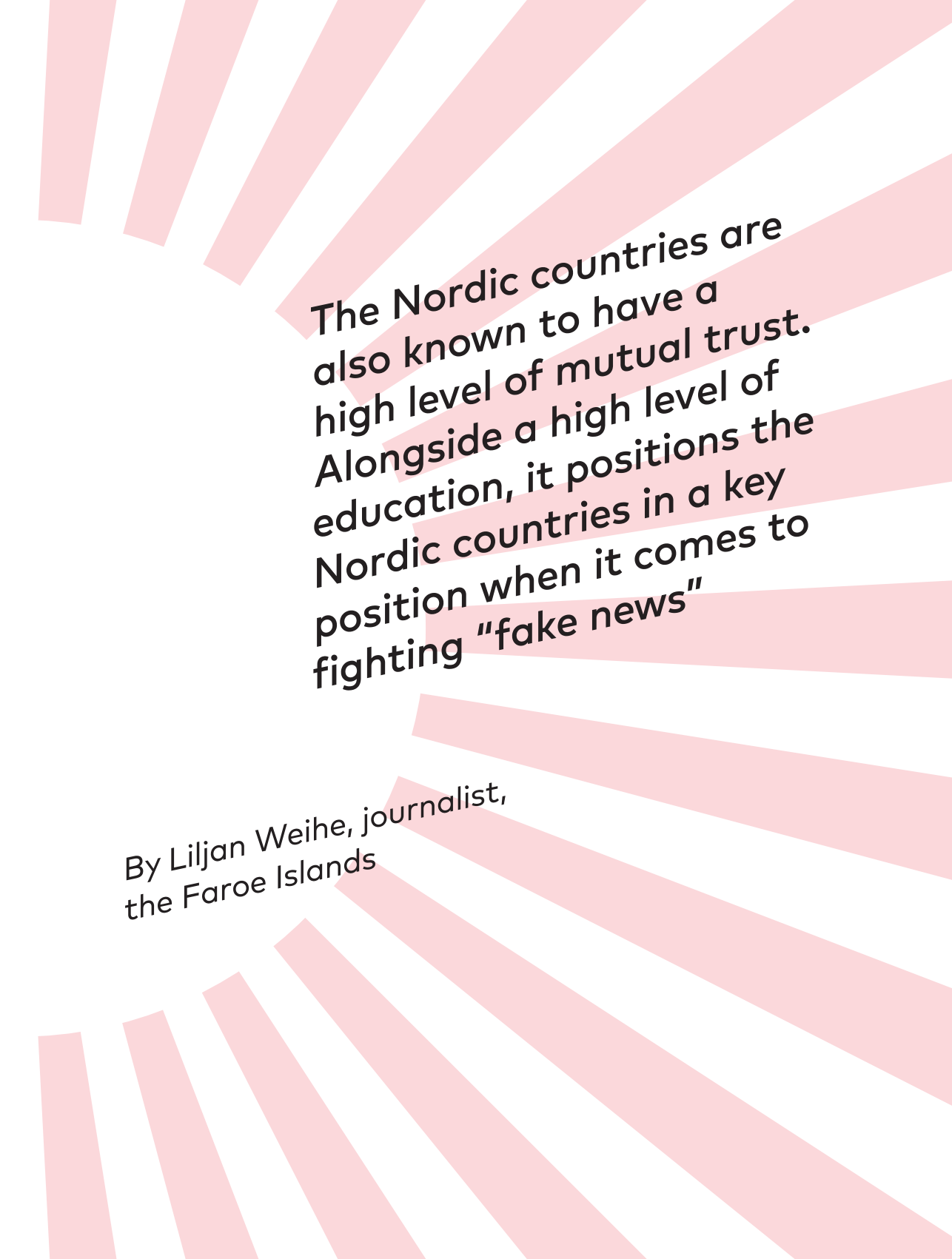
- 1 It is predictable. In Norway, there is only one code of ethics that applies to the media, making the principles predictable and able to adhere to for reporters, sources and the public.
- 2 The whole media business is part of it. All the media; newspapers, digital news media, magazines, radios and TVs, public and private media, respect and follow the code of ethics in their daily reporting. They respect the right of the Press Council to criticise them and their decisions to publish the judgement about the critiques. In some countries, there are different systems for the print and broadcasting media, which often leaves online media in the vacuum.
- 3 Everyone support the press council. Media employees, owners, media organisations and the unions support and finance the Norwegian Press Association and the Press Council. Publishers, editors and journalists are actively participating in its decision-making process.
- 4 The public has a strong voice. The press council consists of two representatives from the journalists' union, two from the editors' organisation and three from members of the public.
- 5 It is a transparent system. The process of dealing with complaints is open and transparent. The meetings of the council are live streamed. Both the complainant and the public can follow the delivery of the judgement.
- 6 It is documented. The documentation, the files and the archives of all the cases that have been tried by the press council are easily accessible for all on the internet.
- 7 It's free and efficient.

It is, therefore, natural to assume that a strong and established self-regulatory system makes the media more accountable in their daily reporting when knowing that their work can be brought to the press council. It is also a fact in Norway that experienced sources, most skilled PR or information officers in the public and private sectors are well aware of the code of ethics, its intentions and obligations. It provides a common ground for these people working in different, sometimes controversial environment.

Making a promise is always a risky business and stating what one represents is likewise risky. Fighting a devastating war against "fake news", distrust and trolls with a soft gun of lofty words will not bring victory. To be able to differentiate journalism from all that is not, voicing ethical obligations and accountability can be vital. But it is not sufficient. The final quest for the power of journalism will always be the day-to-day reporting, fairness, accuracy and the ability to stay relevant to our audience.

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Demo-
cracy
first



The Nordic countries are also known to have a high level of mutual trust. Alongside a high level of education, it positions the Nordic countries in a key position when it comes to fighting "fake news"

By Liljan Weihe, journalist,
the Faroe Islands

The Nordic countries are the most democratic in the world. According to The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), Nordic countries take four out of the five top spots on the list. The result is based on the assessment of the electoral process, pluralism, civil liberties, functioning of the government, political participation and political culture.

The Nordic countries share a common history and culture. The countries have a long tradition of freedom of expression and freedom of media. The Nordic countries are also known to have a high level of mutual trust. Alongside a high level of education, it puts the Nordic countries in a key position when it comes to fighting "fake news".

Fighting "fake news" is not only done in the press or social media as it is a much larger issue. It is a public interest and must be done in the society as a whole. It has to be fought in the media, in the educational system and of course be a political priority.

Fighting "fake news" in school

The population in the Nordic countries is well educated. The educational system is well established and education is mandatory for all children and youths. A democratic upbringing has been a part of the Nordic culture for decades. Generations have been brought up to become democratically responsible individuals. But now the democratic culture is threatened by the wide spread of the so-called "fake news". Navigating through all the information on the internet and social media while learning to know the difference between lies and truth is a skill that must be acquired. Therefore, Media and Information Literacy (MIL) should be a natural part of the upbringing of democratic citizens.

"Fake news" should be part of the school curriculum, so children are taught how to distinguish fakes from facts. This means teaching children to be critical consumers of news and information. The schools are already fighting bullying and harassment among children and youths in co-operation with the police and other authorities. Creating awareness of disinformation and propaganda could be part of a larger MIL strategy in the educational system in the Nordic region and worldwide. This can be done with the media and journalists taking an active part in educating the younger generations to be critical when consuming news and information – especially from the social media.

Social interaction has changed over the last couple of years. "fake news" is not a new invention but rather a new term for propaganda and disinformation. However, the wide spread of "fake news" is a new challenge. The internet, especially social media, are the main distributors of "fake news". Fighting fakes is therefore also teaching children and youths not only to be critical consumers of news and information but also being responsible users and distributors of news and information.

Democratic awareness

However, the educational system cannot do it alone. Teachers and schools must co-operate closely with all other citizens in creating awareness about lies, disinformation and propaganda. This means that everybody from the parents to the soccer coach must be educated in distinguishing fakes from facts and teaching the children and young people the same.

The Nordic countries have high rates of democratic participation. Not only on election day, but overall. This culture of democratic participation can be used to fight "fake news". The long tradition of freedom of expression

also means that the Nordic countries have a healthy debate culture. Together with a high level of participation through all sorts of associations and community work, it makes democracies in the Nordic region strongly grounded and capable of fighting threats like "fake news".

In media we trust

The Nordic countries have a relatively high trust in traditional media. Some of the oldest newspapers, still published by print, are from the region. The Nordic countries also have a long tradition of public service radio and TV stations and government subsidized media.

Media and journalists in the Nordic countries have a huge responsibility in keeping the high level of trust in the population. Media and journalists also have a great responsibility in the upbringing of critical yet democratic citizens.

There are several actions the media and journalists can take in order to fight fakes. They can identify and expose "fake news" as disinformation, lies and propaganda for consumers. This means using resources to fight fakes in addition to producing news. This means maintaining a high ethical standard. And this means taking social responsibility and educating the public.

High quality journalism is key. We should focus on prioritizing good research, fact-checking and educating journalists. Journalists have been living in the "fast track" in the last decades because of the increasing demands of being the first to break the news online. Maybe it is time now to slow down, to get off the highway and take the slow country road for a while. Like in traffic, slowing down sharpens your senses and allows you to see the details of the scenery. Being first to break the news is not a virtue in itself, especially when it involves a "hit and run" once in a while. However, being good is a virtue worth paying for.

Social media in decline?

Most people get their news fix through social media. Social media is the main distributor of news and thereby also of propaganda, lies and disinformation. Like regular gossip is not reliable, neither is the news feed from social media. A responsible and democratically conscious citizen should be aware of this and seek his or her own news and information on the internet by visiting reliable news websites and cross-checking information on the internet.


A Danish report from 2017 shows that the population has a high level of trust in the traditional media. Most Danes believe that the traditional media is capable of distinguishing "fake news" from facts for them. The trust in social media doing the same is low. The report also shows that the number of people getting news through social media is in decline from 56% in 2016 to 53% in 2017.

Maybe this is a glimpse of the future news and information consumers.

"Fake news" are a matter of fact

"Fake news" are here. That is a fact. But it is not too late to eliminate the influence it has on society. The Nordic countries and democracies throughout the world still have the upper hand. Through a joint effort from an individual level to the educational system, together with the media and politicians, "fake news" can be put out of business.

The news and information consumers and distributors of all ages need to be educated in order to appreciate and demand quality content and not just be satisfied with the information they receive through a quick fix on social media.

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**Collabora-
tion makes
a difference
in fighting
"fake news"**



"Fake news" is nothing new but surely has a bigger impact today than before because there is almost no restriction on publishing and sharing information online

By Tone Gunhild Haugan-Hepsø,
adviser and media literacy expert,
Norwegian Media Authority

The Nordic countries are similar in terms of society, education and the level of digital development. Our societies are democratic and stable. The population is highly educated. Schools, households, public and private organisations actively use a great number of information and communication technologies. The Nordic countries also face similar challenges in the promotion of media and information literacy (MIL). These challenges are related to the rapid media convergence, the rise of mobile technology, the importance of media culture and education in people's everyday life from an early age.

Nordic collaboration increases critical understanding

The Nordic media authorities collaborate through networks in promoting MIL competence. The first initiative the Nordic MIL-network did was to organise a Nordic-Baltic conference on the subject in May 2016. A key goal of the collaboration is to increase the critical understanding of media content among stakeholders and the population in general. "Fake news" is of course a key topic.

The Norwegian Media Authority (2017) defines "fake news" as *News-like stories that deliberately spread lies, propaganda or the like. The purpose may, among other things, be politically motivated, creating a chaos of information, economic gain (clickbait) or fraud. "Fake news" often looks like regular news stories and can be difficult to detect.*

Both in Sweden (Svenska folket om "fejk-nyheter", TU Sverige 2017) and Norway (Falske nyheter, Medietilsynet 2017), studies in the adult population on the perception of the extent of "fake news" have been conducted recently. In Norway, 55 percent of the population suspected that they, weekly or more often, read news that they considered inaccurate. In the Swedish population, this share was 60 percent. Regarding the sharing of "fake news", 6 percent of the Swedish population reported having shared a news article or a news story that they

knew or suspected to be false. In the Norwegian population, 15 percent state that they have, once or several times, shared a news story they knew or suspected to be fake online.

"Fake news" – a threat to democracy

With the rapid media development and the expansion of global information and media platforms like Facebook and Google, challenges are being magnified. Side by side with quality content such as editorial news, documentary, research, science and entertainment, the online world also promotes propaganda, lies, hoaxes, disinformation, "fake news", alternative facts and fake videos. This "dark side" of the globalised information reality is a fundamental threat to the credibility of the media, and eventually to democracy itself.

"Fake news" is nothing new but surely has a bigger impact today than before because there is almost no restriction on publishing and sharing information online. Social media and search engines, with their algorithms and programmatic advertising, speed up the spread of information and enable a global reach without much effort from the author.

With artificial intelligence and the manipulation of live and still images, lies, disinformation and propaganda are being taken to a new level. Fake videos may appear so convincingly that it is becoming difficult to distinguish from fact to fiction. These technologies give rise to the consequences and impact of "fake news". Fighting fakes is therefore becoming even more important, and citizens need tools to debunk the stories and videos.

But technology and tools are not sufficient to fight against "fake news". A critical understanding of media content and information sources in the population in general, is important to improve MIL. To increase MIL, a capacity to reach out to the population with relevant knowledge and information is required. The following is a brief description of two initiatives, in which one of them the Norwegian Media Authority took part in.

Initiative 1: Faktisk.no – Joining forces to fight against “fake news”

One interesting initiative in the Norwegian media industry is the establishment of a collaborative fact-checking organisation. Four competing media companies (*NRK*, *TV2*, *Dagbladet* and *VG*) joined forces in March 2017 to establish “Faktisk.no”, a non-commercial fact-checking service. The main goals of the initiative are to debunk “fake news” and alternative facts, investigate statements in the public debate and reveal errors in media content in general.

The editor-in chief of Faktisk.no, Kristoffer Egeberg, experienced a shift in the public debate since they started. Journalists and politicians seem to be more aware of fact-checking. Journalists are more accountable for their editorial work, both in investigating their sources and in ensuring that headlines correctly represent the content of their news articles. Politicians also seem to check the facts to a greater extent, in order to avoid the embarrassment of spreading falsehood. The audience also seems to show greater interest and engagement in fact-checking. They are becoming more confident in questioning news stories.

In order to increase the reach of fact-checking, anyone who wants to print or publish them on their own platforms, are welcomed to do so free of charge. This distribution policy enables a much wider spread online.

The establishment and function of Faktisk.no has inspired several media companies in Sweden to establish a similar fact-checking service called Faktiskt.se which will be launched in the middle of April 2018.

Initiative 2: Pre-electoral campaign to fight “fake news”

Before the general election in 2017, The Norwegian Media Authority joined a campaign together with Facebook

and Faktisk.no. The goal was to limit the spread of "fake news" online. The campaign explains "fake news" and raise awareness of individuals' role in countering the spread of "fake news". It produced a poster containing ten practical tips that printed as a full-page advertisement in 70 newspapers. The advertisement reached about 1.2 million Norwegian readers. The following day, the ten tips also appeared as stories on top of the Facebook newsfeed of every Norwegian user over the age of 18. This reached 3.5 million users which are more than two thirds of the population.

The campaign advised readers to be skeptical towards catchy headlines, to look closely at the URL and to watch out for unusual formatting of the story. People were also advised to, when in doubt, investigate the sources, photos, dates and evidence of the news story.

Demand social media giants to take responsibility

As media authorities we demand that the media industry and social media giants to take greater responsibility in the fight against "fake news", propaganda and disinformation. This responsibility is key to ensure ethical conducts and self-regulatory mechanisms in editorial functions. It would help promoting the media industry's integrity and credibility towards media consumers. The initiatives described above proved that the Nordic industry players and the media authorities share the same goals. The collaboration is a useful tool to achieve a greater general awareness of, and thus a better protection from, the consequences of "fake news".

Tone Gunhild Haugan-Hepsø has written this chapter in cooperation with Mari Velsand, Director General of the Norwegian Media Authority.

Recom- menda- tions

By Per Lundgren and Mogens Blicher Bjerregård

The fight against "fake news" is on top of the agenda worldwide among most of the media stakeholders as everybody wants to deliver trustworthy content. Everyday, new ideas emerge to counter propaganda, lies and disinformation. The experts meeting in Copenhagen and the contributions to this booklet put forward some important recommendations for further discussion:

- Support a diverse media landscape by high quality journalism and pluralism. There is also a responsibility in making investigative journalism profitable and as an indispensable part of journalism in a free and independent media landscape;
- Considering the increased use of social media there is a need to focus on the new fact-checking organisations and encourage also social media to comply fully with self-regulation and to share their best practices and cooperate;
- Promote Media and Information Literacy (MIL) in order reach out to citizens and use education as a tool to teach and train people to understand the context and process of propaganda, commercial messages, information and journalism;
- Promote critical thinking and responsible content production. This should be gender balanced with youth inclusion, regardless of media, and enhancing skills to analyze advertising, propaganda, information and journalism;
- Refrain from legislation or regulation in the fighting against

fakes. Instead, we should encourage and support self-regulatory systems that are based on ethical principles developed, adopted and supported by all journalists and media outlets. Independent self-regulatory bodies such as press councils should, in each country, cover all types of media. They should so be respected by all media outlets including online, print and broadcasting media;

- Facilitate roundtable discussion, seminars or other informal meetings among media organisations, media divisions and universities in order to develop ideas, mechanisms and materials for MIL;
- Increase transparency in the media industry regarding ownership, public interests and the process of journalism.

To conclude, the best way to fight against fakes is to improve the quality of journalism and to ensure media pluralism. Robust fact-checking mechanisms, cooperation and self-regulation are among many of the effective tools to achieve the goal.

We should strongly support high quality journalism and reach out to all citizens as the best way to fight against "fake news".

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Fighting Fakes – the Nordic Way

Word matters and is the foundation for dialogue and democracy and so is trust. Thus, the phenomenon “Fake News” understood as propaganda, lies, disinformation and fake factory stories are serious threats to our democracies.

The Nordic Council of Ministers urges for finding ways to meet this challenge and is launching a booklet to create a debate on how to counter fakes and build trust in words and facts.

The booklet is based upon results from a meeting in September 2017 of a high-level group of key experts on the topic and in particular from four experts contributing by focusing on media and information literacy, ethical standards and quality journalism to be among the best tools to counter fakes.

This booklet will be launched at the UNESCO World Press Freedom Day 2018 in Accra asking for international feedback on its recommendations.

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