

Content Creators and Journalists: Redefining News and Credibility in the Digital Age

Edited by Summer Harlow



Content Creators and Journalists: Redefining News and Credibility in the Digital Age

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Knight Center's Foreword

Rosental Calmon Alves

Rosental Calmon Alves is the founder and director of the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas. He holds the UNESCO Chair in Communication and the Knight Chair in Journalism at the Moody College of Communication's School of Journalism and Media at the University of Texas at Austin.



About 20 years ago, around the same time I became the holder of the UNESCO Chair in Communication at the University of Texas at Austin, I started repeating a prediction in my talks as a digital evangelizer for journalists and media organizations: “We will move from the era of mass media to an era of a mass of media.”

I also argued that we would move from an “institutional media-centric” to an “I-centric” media ecosystem, as individuals would be empowered with capabilities that once were the exclusive privilege of media institutions.

“Journalists and news organizations will lose their monopoly of journalism,” I would add, sparking heated discussions in newsrooms, boardrooms, and universities with journalists and academics who considered my prediction an exaggeration.

This book is a testament to the importance of one of the most interesting phenomena of the impact of the digital revolution on the news media ecosystem: the proliferation of influencers or content creators suddenly endowed with the privileges of media organizations to gather, process, and distribute information to large audiences.

For more than a decade, the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas has been working with UNESCO on many projects. The first was a series of massive online courses that started a decade ago on “The International Framework of Freedom of Expression and Protection of Journalists,” which trained more than 12,000 judges and other judicial operators in Latin America. In March of 2020, the day after the WHO declared COVID a global pandemic, UNESCO and the Knight Center began working on a series of online courses and webinars in multiple languages that helped thousands of journalists who were in need of training to cover a pandemic. Almost 10,000 people participated in the first course!

So, I was not surprised when UNESCO contacted us in May 2023 with the idea of a project on the rise of influencers or content creators and the relation to journalism, the *infodemic* (the spread of mis- and disinformation), and the need for more media and information literacy.

This collaboration between UNESCO and the Knight Center resulted in an unprecedented project to navigate uncharted waters. It was carefully planned to be implemented via five main activities:

- ➔ A roundtable discussion with influencers and journalists from around the world, which took place in Austin on April 11, 2024;
- ➔ A panel discussion at the 25th International Symposium on Online Journalism, also in Austin, on “Influencers/content creators and journalists: What can they learn from each other?;”
- ➔ Coverage of UNESCO’s 31st World Press Freedom Day Conference in Chile, on May 2-4, 2024, by a youth newsroom that included influencers and climate activists along with journalists from around the world for the first time;
- ➔ This e-book that analyzes and consolidates lessons and observations from the previous activities of the project and sheds light on the phenomenon of influencers and journalism;
- ➔ And the upcoming massive online course “[Digital Content Creators and Journalists: How to be a Trusted Voice Online.](#)”

I am grateful to Ms. Audrey Azoulay, UNESCO’s Director-General; Dr. Tawfik Jelassi, Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information; and many UNESCO staff directly or indirectly involved with this project. Special gratitude to Guilherme Canela, chief of the section of Freedom of Expression and Safety, with whom this dream-project idea started; and Ms. Adeline Hulin, head of unit for Media and Information Literacy and Digital Competencies, who led a superb team that worked directly to make this happen.

I extend my gratitude also to all influencers/content creators and journalists who collaborated with the Knight Center’s team led by my colleague, Dr. Summer Harlow, Knight Center’s Associate Director, who is the editor of this book. She worked tirelessly to coordinate this project, from the roundtable discussion to the online course. Thank you so much to Summer and the amazing team of the Knight Center.

Enjoy this great book!

UNESCO's Foreword

Tawfik Jelassi

Dr. Tawfik Jelassi is UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information.



In today's digital age, influencers and content creators dominate the global information landscape, reshaping how we consume and share ideas. As traditional media channels lose influence, particularly among younger audiences, these modern communicators are increasingly the primary sources of information. With the power to reach millions of followers or engage niche communities, they play a crucial role in shaping public discourse. Ensuring that they provide ethical, credible and professional content is essential to addressing misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech on digital platforms.

Despite their growing reach, influencers and digital creators face a significant challenge: the lack of institutional support, oversight, and recognition. Compared to their counterparts in established media, these new-age communicators often operate without comprehensive normative guidance or standards, which can leave their work vulnerable to criticism regarding quality and authenticity. This gap underscores the urgent need for a framework that acknowledges their contributions while equipping them with the skills to uphold high standards of ethical communication.

UNESCO, committed to safeguarding freedom of expression and ensuring access to reliable information, recognizes the vital role that influencers and digital content creators play in the modern media ecosystem. Through initiatives aimed at empowering them, alongside journalists and other media professionals, UNESCO strives to foster a digital communication environment that reflects human rights principles and helps curb the spread of mis- and dis-information. By promoting Media and Information Literacy (MIL), UNESCO supports the development of a more informed and connected society.

This e-book is part of a broader initiative developed through a collaboration between UNESCO and the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas. It is designed to create a space where influencers, content creators and journalists can converge, exchange insights, and learn from one another. The goal is clear: to equip all communicators with MIL skills,

knowledge, and tools needed to “Be a Trusted Voice Online,” thereby enhancing the quality of information in the public sphere.

By recognizing and empowering content creators as vital sources of information, UNESCO is dedicated to advancing a media-literate society. This aligns seamlessly with our broader mission to defend freedom of expression, promote human rights, and champion ethical practices in the digital era.

Together, we can build a future where informed, critical engagement with media is the norm, ensuring that the digital space remains a force for good in the world.

Introduction

Summer Harlow

Dr. Summer Harlow is the Associate Director of the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas and a visiting associate professor at the University of Texas at Austin.



The “rise of the journalist-influencer” was among the 2021 predictions for journalism from Harvard’s Nieman Journalism Lab. In April 2024, a panel at the 25th annual International Symposium for Online Journalism in Austin, Texas, debated what journalists and influencers could learn from each other. A couple of weeks later, the International Journalism Festival in Perugia, Italy, hosted a panel, “The rise of news influencers: what journalists must learn.” And at the annual Online News Association conference in September in Atlanta, Georgia, at least two sessions were dedicated to understanding news and digital content creation.

Influencers, or digital content creators, are gaining an increasingly large foothold in the news sphere—just look at the way the Democratic National Convention (DNC) in the U.S. gave more than 200 creators media credentials to cover Kamala Harris’ presidential nomination. The journalism industry is on high alert as news audiences continue to migrate away from legacy media to social media, and many young people place more trust in TikTokers than journalists working at storied news outlets. According to the 2024 Digital News Report from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, more than half of TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram users get their news from “personalities” on social media, as opposed to mainstream outlets and journalists.

This shift in what journalism is and who is a journalist is certainly not a new phenomenon, but, thanks to social media, it is a particularly visible one. For example, V Spehar, who crawled under their desk to record a TikTok video trying to make sense of the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, now has more than 3 million followers just on TikTok who tune in for Spehar’s take on the news of the day. Spehar uses their influence not just to tell the news via their “Under the Desk News” channel, but also to refute criticism from traditional journalists who claim that what Spehar and others like them do is not “real” journalism.

“I used to want to be a journalist, but I’m proud to be a content creator and influencer,” Spehar said in an August 2024 TikTok video “Why can’t weeeee be friends.” “Now, if you’ve been online in the

last week, you've seen this one-sided beef from traditional media against content creators who were at the DNC...You can hear all kinds of freelance journalists talk about how activism is not journalism and how content creators and influencers will never be journalists. Well, if 'journalist' is what you folks are, I don't wanna be that because apparently your fancy J-school didn't teach you anything about how activism journalism is what actually holds truth to power. Back in the 1930s and 40s, *The New York Times*, America's paper of record, refused to cover the rise of Nazism and the Holocaust. They said there was no objective way to cover the rise of Nazism."

In the four-minute video, which has garnered more than 460,000 views, Spehar goes on to undercut the argument that influencers shouldn't do ads because that's not journalism—"as if *The Washington Post* isn't owned by Jeff Bezos"—but importantly, they also highlight the excellent work some journalists are doing on social media, saying in regards to Dave Jorgensen's *Washington Post* TikTok team, "I hope you win that Pulitzer."

Spehar concludes by underscoring the value in journalists and content creators being on the same side.

"The fact is, we're better when we work together and I hope we can lay down this beef because the truth is...we're going to see a rise of more independent journalism with independent channels on YouTube or TikTok or Twitch," they said. "The place you broadcast from matters a whole lot less than the things you say in the community you can build. So, truth—can we be cool?"

The idea that journalists and content creators can work together might be controversial, but all indications seem to point to a future—if not present—time when "news" is not intrinsically linked to "journalists." During an April 2024 all-day roundtable discussion between influencers and journalists organized by the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas in collaboration with UNESCO, French YouTuber and journalist Hugo Travers, a.k.a. [HugoDécrypte](#), questioned the need to distinguish between "news content creator" and "journalist."

"I'm not sure the public really makes a difference or asks themselves, 'oh, but is he a journalist or is he just a content creator doing journalism?'" said Travers, who has amassed nearly 3 million subscribers on YouTube and more than 4 million followers on Instagram. He went on to say, "I don't know, really, if people define us as journalists or content creators, and I honestly don't care as long as I know what I'm doing and how I'm doing it."

Similarly, Sam Ellis, a former Vox journalist who created the successful YouTube news channel [Search Party](#) and who also participated in the Austin Roundtable discussion, said young people who are interested in journalism and content creation don't have to "pick a lane."

"If you want to be a journalist now, you should be able to run an H5 Zoom [audio recorder] for podcasts," Ellis said. "You want to do video, you should know rudimentary editing skills. You should also be able to write as well because, you know, TikTok was four years ago, but what's next? We don't know what's going to be next. And in this day and age, you should be flexible with what you are able to do. And that doesn't necessarily need to mean you need to be a pro at one of those things, or all those things. But they should know how to do all of them."

In recognizing that social media and other emerging technologies are making “journalism” more of a spectrum than a cut-and-dried concept with easily defined boundaries, there arises the need to understand the challenges, opportunities, and limits that come with blurring the lines between journalists and news influencers/content creators—or “newsfluencers.”

And that’s where this book comes in. The chapters in this edited volume offer insight into what happens when journalists and content creators work together to tell the news.

In Part I, “What Digital Content Creators and Journalists Can Learn from Each Other,” my chapter examines the Austin Roundtable discussions about the intersections between journalism and content creation. Carolina De Assis’ chapter recounts lessons learned from an experimental Youth Multimedia Room that brought together journalists, influencers, and activists to cover the 2024 World Press Freedom Day conference in Santiago, Chile. And the chapter from Arly Faundes B. provides a first-hand account of what it was like to oversee and edit the participants in this unique newsroom.

Part II, “Up Close and Personal with Newsfluencers from around the World,” includes profiles of various journalist-influencers, like Enrique Anarte Lazo of Spain, who leads the [Openly](#) TikTok team for the Thomson Reuters Foundation, and who is one of the lead instructors for the online course “[Digital Content Creators and Journalists: How to be a Trusted Voice Online](#),” from the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas in collaboration with UNESCO. Also learn about award-winning journalist Kassy Cho, of Taiwan, who created the Instagram-first news platform [Almost](#), and [Charity Ekezie](#), a Nigerian TikToker and journalist dispelling myths about Africa.

In Part III, “Content Creators and Climate Change,” hear from three content creators and activists focused on fact-checking climate misinformation and getting young people interested in environmental activism.

Part IV, “Content Creators as Catalysts for Media and Information Literacy,” provides information about disinformation, fact-checking, and legal frameworks for freedom of expression that content creators and journalists around the world will find useful as they navigate the changing media landscape. The chapter about Brazil’s [Redes Cordiais](#) (Cordial Networks) organization is a valuable case study in media and information literacy training for influencers to make the internet a safer space for everyone.

Lastly, Part V, “So You Want To Be a Content Creator,” gives tips and best practices gleaned from the Austin Roundtable, the Santiago Youth Multimedia Room, and the massive online course.

With the legacy news business in decline, the growth of newsfluencers on social media perhaps represents a watershed moment for the journalism industry to reinvent itself, making news more relevant and accessible to a greater diversity of people. We hope this book offers a collaborative path forward, to a space where content creators and journalists take the best of what the other has to offer in order to provide the quality journalism the world needs now more than ever.



Part 1: What Digital Content Creators and Journalists Can Learn from Each Other

1. The blurred lines between content creators and journalists: Challenges and opportunities

Summer Harlow



Hugo Travers, a digital content creator known for his news channel Hugo Décrypte, speaks at the 25th International Symposium on Online Journalism in Austin, Texas. He also participated in a roundtable discussion that brought together journalists and creators. Photo by Patricia Lim.

When Hugo Travers started posting interviews on YouTube, journalists often dismissed him as “just” an influencer, or “just” a content creator. By no means was he a journalist, they said. Over the years, though, his audience grew and his influence deepened — he interviewed French President Emmanuel Macron and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, as well as stars like Timothée Chalamet and Zendaya. By 2024, his channel “HugoDécrypte” boasted more than 14 million followers across platforms and employed a team of 25.

Journalists’ perceptions of him began to change.

“Now the media is saying, ‘oh, you have such a big number of followers, and you have a team of journalists, so now, okay, we can say you’re a journalist,’ even though my content didn’t change,” Travers said. “I mean, it’s more professional; we’ve got better video stuff, but it’s still the same content.”

Travers’ videos rack up more than 235 million monthly views on TikTok and YouTube, and his Instagram account alone has roughly twice as many followers as the French newspaper of

record, *Le Monde*. And while he has a master's degree in communications and a mission to make news accessible and engaging for French youth, the Forbes 30 Under 30 awardee and one of GQ's 2023 men of the year considers himself more of a "YouTuber" than a journalist per se. On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is a straight-up professional journalist, and 10 is a full-on digital content creator or "influencer," he places himself somewhere in the middle. But knowing how to label his professional identity is no easy task.

"All content creators can be journalists, all journalists can be content creators," he said. "And so it's not like one or the other. And you can be both at the same time, I believe, if you follow certain rules of journalism and at the same time, create content online. So that's what makes it difficult."

Travers' hesitation to fully identify as a journalist or content creator —he doesn't like the term "influencer" because he said it has a negative connotation — illustrates just one of the challenges that come with this evolving digital media landscape and the introduction of new actors contesting traditional ways of doing journalism and reaching news audiences. Travers, like the other participants at an April 2024 all-day roundtable discussion organized by the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas in collaboration with UNESCO, is a "newsfluencer," working at the intersection of journalism and digital content creation.

That roundtable discussion, featuring eight participants from Colombia, Ghana, Finland, France, Nigeria, the United Kingdom, and the United States, explored the dynamics of blending professional, ethical journalism with digital content creation, highlighting the potential for collaborations that could help create a more informed, media literate, and engaged society. This chapter encapsulates the essence of that roundtable discussion held in Austin, Texas, offering insights and lessons learned that could prove valuable for media and communication professionals worldwide.

Roles and responsibilities

Overall, the roundtable participants seemed to view journalists as having more stringent ethical and professional responsibilities, while content creators were seen as having more freedom that allowed them to cover news and reach audiences in ways that traditional journalists can't.

"Journalists operate in a more rigid condition than the content creators, and it isn't only about ethics, but also, newsrooms have their news styles or what they call house style," said Manasseh Azure, the founding editor in chief of *The Fourth Estate*, a nonprofit, public interest and investigative journalism project of the Media Foundation for West Africa in Ghana.

The flexibility content creators have is what allows them to "fill the gaps left by traditional journalists," Azure said. "There are a lot of things we [journalists] cannot do, which they [creators] do. Sometimes we are happy they are doing it because we are constrained, so they fill a very important gap. So I believe from the perspective of the audience or those who consume the content, they have a special role."

Similarly, Hannah Ajakaiye, who leads Nigeria's *FactsMatterNG*, an initiative of the International Center for Journalists that promotes information integrity by making facts go viral, said, "I think digital content creators can reach audiences in a less formal way. So that is something that often journalists can't do. And if you are printing news in a media landscape where there is less trust in established media platforms, they kind of fill that gap by providing information to people in languages that they can understand."

Sam Ellis, the creator and showrunner of *Search Party*, an independent video journalism project on YouTube that investigates and decodes news around geopolitics and global sports, noted that being on social media allows creators to reach niche audiences that large media outlets often ignore: "What's cool about being independent is that you can create a channel dedicated to things that otherwise a big media organization wouldn't...be interested in."

While content creators may have more flexibility, this can lead to concerns about accuracy and professionalism. Azure emphasized the importance of trustworthiness for content creators: "If content creators really want to get this kind of power, authority, they need to also think about how trustworthy they are, and not only how many people they are able to reach."

The creators in the roundtable said they recognized the importance of building trust and credibility to be taken seriously on important topics.

Importantly, the flexibility creators might have doesn't mean they can't do journalism, said Salla-Rosa Leinonen, producer and writer working for the Finnish Public Broadcaster Yle, and co-instructor for the Knight Center and UNESCO online course "[Digital Content Creators and Journalists: How To Be a Trusted Voice Online.](#)"

"Journalism can be less formally presented," she said. "I think it's not impossible to be more relaxed and still keep the guidelines and all the rules in place."

Dylan Page, better known as the U.K.'s News Daddy for his TikTok channel that aggregates news for roughly 13 million followers, said the rules, ethics, and codes that bind journalists are not much different than those creators must adhere to if they want to build a successful business.

"If you have a customer, the viewer, and they watch one of your videos and you got these things wrong and you continuously, continually get those things wrong, you're not going to be able to make it as a business," he said. "And so the audience that you have, they're, I think, a determining factor of success in how large you are... and how many years you can spend doing that while still growing and being successful. So yeah, I can if I wanted to, I can go on and say anything I want, but I'll lose my audience and it goes completely against everything that I want to do. So to be successful as a content creator in the new news space, to be successful is built in to be correct, factual, because otherwise you're not going to do it for very long. You can say whatever, but you know, it works against you."

Ellis noted that when thinking about roles and responsibilities, it's important to distinguish between types of content creators, and ultimately most creators aim to entertain, even if they're providing news and information.

“Journalists have always been content creators,” he said. “I view journalism as an action...based on a set of rules and responsibilities. So a content creator can do journalism, but they also can not do journalism. I kept thinking of Emma Chamberlain, she’s a vlogger. She’s a content creator. She doesn’t really have a responsibility to her audience. She could wake up and decide one day to do a fake play or something; that’s totally fine with content creators. Journalists have this set of rules that they have to, or should, follow, and that’s kind of the difference.”

Travers said he didn’t see content creators as fulfilling any particular societal role in the same way journalists do.

“Loads of content creators do funny, useful, interesting stuff,” he said. “I think content creator itself, it’s more like a technique or a way of doing something than a mission...If you think of ‘role’ as a mission, well, a content creator... can be a journalist, but also a content creator. So I feel like it’s more like a way of doing something than a mission or specific role.”



Sam Ellis and Hannah Ajakaiye pair up to discuss similarities and differences in their work during the Austin, Texas, roundtable that brought together digital content creators and journalists. Photo by Summer Harlow.

Ethics

Roundtable participants’ understandings of roles and responsibilities intertwined with a discussion of ethical standards and trust. Participants saw journalists as driven, ideally, by a public service mission to inform the public, hold power to account, and provide accurate, fair, and balanced reporting. Their work is guided by established ethical and professional standards that emphasize impartiality, accuracy, and accountability. Journalists adhere to rigorous fact-checking processes and editorial oversight to ensure the accuracy and credibility of their content. They are expected to present multiple perspectives and avoid conflicts of interest.

In contrast, participants said digital content creators often focus on personal branding, entertainment, and engagement with their audience. Their content is typically more subjective, reflecting personal opinions or experiences, and may prioritize relatability and engagement over traditional journalistic notions of objectivity. Their content also often blends personal insights with information, so that they don't necessarily follow the same rigorous standards as journalists. While some creators strive for accuracy, the emphasis is more on personal connection and authenticity rather than strict adherence to journalistic standards. While audiences often expect creators to be transparent, especially when it comes to sponsorships and partnerships, the lines can be blurred, and the level of disclosure may vary significantly among influencers.

For Leinonen, one of the biggest ethical questions is knowing from where content creators derive their income.

"So, who is funding it? Are you doing sponsorships? Where do you get your money from?" she asked. "I think that has a big impact on the content itself."

As much as funding, motives behind why they became a creator in the first place can dictate ethics and content, Azure said.

"There's some who decide that, well, I want to entertain. So they go into it," he said. "There are some [who are] profit-oriented. They are going into content creation to make profit, and that is their motive. There are some who are political that are going to produce content to favor this political party or that. There are others who are also into advocacy and social justice...And there are others that, for me, all that they do is to spread propaganda and disinformation. So I think what got them into content creation can greatly determine what they do and how they do it."

Audiences

Transparency, participants agreed, was key to building trust and credibility.

"Traditional media is often seen as sort of a black box," Travers said. "We had, during the presidential election, a weekly program on Twitch where we would just put a camera in the newsroom. I would just launch a live Twitch and, like, answer people's questions and like, bring in journalists on scene, and be like, okay, we've got this candidate, and like, there's a whole debate about the way to cover this news topic, how should we do it? Do you feel like the way we've been doing it is right or wrong? And also, it's a way for us to show that we're not perfect...We're trying to find the best way possible. But, I mean, we're not sure we've got the best way possible. So I feel like this sort of open transparency helps a lot."

Travers and his team even go so far as to let audiences know why certain stories might not have been covered, even if it's just because they ran out of time and will get to it later—something you'd never see a TV news station do, he said.

Part of being transparent also means being open about who you are, roundtable participants said.

Audiences have to be able to see you in the content, Page said, if you want them to trust you.

“You want to be able to create content that you find enjoyable, and the end result of that will be good content, and they [audiences] will love it,” he said. “Because if you talk about a current piece of news or a topic or whatever that you’re really interested in, that changes it entirely for your audience.”

Similarly, Ellis said, “Journalists do need to show more of themselves. When I was at Vox, I did not appear on camera... You quickly learn that as an independent channel on YouTube, they have to see you. And so you don’t need to be the star, the host of the show, but like, now, I appear at the end. Now I appear in the middle, like around the edges, kind of. It does make a big difference. It’s almost mandatory, I think, now.”

Being direct with audiences and “de-jargonizing” content also goes a long way, participants said.

Journalists are “too technical,” Azure said, which means audiences tend to tune them out. “So I think what the content creators do better is to dejargonize it, or simplify it, so that the average person understands,” he said.

Accessibility doesn’t mean having to “dumb down” the content, participants said, and being engaging is not the same as having to be funny. Rather, creators bring emotion into what they do, and that appeals to audiences.

Tone, personality, and identity are key, said María Paulina Baena, co-creator of Colombian YouTube channel La Pulla, a political, satirical, and opinion journalism program owned by national newspaper El Espectador. Creators talk to their audiences like they would to their friends or family, and journalists need to learn to do that, too, she said: “A 130-year-old newspaper is like a grandfather that doesn’t connect with young people. So the question is, how can you make something cool about journalism the way YouTubers do?”

Amanda Zamora, co-founder and former publisher of The 19th, a nonprofit newsroom focused on gender and politics in the U.S., highlighted the importance of actively engaging with audiences.

“My sort of rule of thumb is if you ask your audience a question, will they actually answer you?” she said. “It’s a good kind of barometer because if you’ve done enough of the legwork of listening to them and being responsive to their needs, that you’re asking relevant questions and that they feel inclined to take the time to respond or offer something in return, I think it’s a good indication that you have a more active, engaged relationship versus a transactional one.”

Overall, most participants indicated that they believed creators’ emphasis on transparency, personalization, and engagement with audiences gave them more trust than what’s found in legacy news media.

“When you have traditional media in an authoritarian regime, every person knows that legacy media is captured,” Azure said. “Then, you have content creators being more believable and trustworthy than traditional media. So I also see the media landscape can determine who is trusted more.”

In the U.S., Zamora said, she thinks creators have a higher “baseline” of trust than traditional media.

Page, though, disagreed, arguing that for major news, if a content creator broke the story, most people wouldn’t fully believe it until they saw it reported on the BBC, for example.

“I think a lot of people can look at content creators and be like, ‘you know, there’s this distrust in legacy media and content creators have trust because they’re personable.’ But, when push comes to shove, the legacy media always almost subconsciously has that authority still,” he said.



Journalists and digital content creators from around the world came to Austin, Texas, for a roundtable discussion as part of a Knight Center and UNESCO project to better understand the changing digital media environment. Photo courtesy of UNESCO.

Fact-checking

Age, platform, and magnitude of the story also come into play, with younger audiences trusting creators on Instagram more than Fox News in the U.S., for example, participants said. But just as trust in legacy news outlets can be misplaced, so, too, can trust in creators. As Ajakaiye pointed out, creators spread a lot of mis- and disinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Preliminary findings from a recent UNESCO survey of 500 content creators from 45 countries suggested about 62% of respondents reported not checking the accuracy of content before sharing it with their audience.

It’s just this lack of fact-checking that concerned Ajakaiye, who worked to try and expand the audience for verified information by partnering with influential people — whether celebrities or digital content creators — to deliver fact-checked information.

It’s important to look at your own media landscape, and “reach audiences that are underserved by the mainstream media platforms,” Ajakaiye said. “Audiences are underserved by fact-

checking content and media literacy. And so we have to be much more deliberate about how we push this content so that it gets to people who can use it.”

Part of the problem, Ajakaiye added, is that journalists and media organizations that fact-check information are not necessarily on TikTok or other spaces where young people are, which means there’s a vacuum of verified information.

Travers suggested that content creators need to know how to fact-check in order to “create a bridge” to the people on social media who aren’t necessarily following the news.

“I feel like our responsibility, whether as journalists or content creators, is not just fact-checking, it’s also just informing where those things are happening,” he said. “So, making sure that those people on social media have reliable sources they can turn to and they can trust, I think that’s most important... Disinformation or misinformation is not always fake news as we hear it, like politicians toying with things to spread fake news. It’s often, at least in France, it’s very often just rumors, or people asking themselves questions, and that’s fine, that’s something that’s human. Sometimes we see something we think is true, and then, it ends up not being true. And so I think that’s something as a journalist or as a media team, you have to be careful to address it, not in a condescending way. People have questions, and it doesn’t mean they’re conspiracy theorists. Sometimes they just have questions... so I think we have to be careful with the way we address them, not be condescending and just try and answer the questions.”

Part of fact-checking also means acknowledging and correcting mistakes, Baena said.

“Being honest with your audience is key,” she said.

Content creators have to be careful, though, because they can’t always just delete content, since that can raise red flags for audiences and hurt trust, participants said.

“You don’t want to make a mistake, but you live through it, you correct it, you’re transparent about it...The best worst option sometimes is just leaving it up and being transparent about it,” Ellis said, adding that he tries to be transparent that just because he posts a video doesn’t mean the story is complete.

Travers gave the example of a time when he and his team had to decide whether to delete a video about a political candidate because it neglected to mention some of the most important issues his audience was interested in.

“Whether it’s a content creator, or me, or a journalist, you have to try and push your ego aside, and if you fail in something, you have to assume that there was an error on that thing. And if you have to change something, you change it,” he said. “We were like, should we delete this video and if you delete it, people would be saying like, ‘that’s not professional.’ Like, ‘what are you doing?’ ‘Why are you deleting it?’ We deleted the video. We published a story saying, ‘we saw your comments, we feel like it’s good feedback, like it’s something that’s useful. And we should put it in this content. So we’ll just republish the video.’..Overall, like 99% of the comments when we said we were doing this were super positive, like, ‘thanks for taking the feedback. Thanks for

just listening to what matters to us.' And so I feel often, transparency, admitting those things, is often seen as a risk, it's unprofessional. But I think it's the other way around. We should try and put this ego aside and assume errors and have this sort of dialogue."

Ultimately, participants said, whether you're a content creator or journalist, storytelling should be fact-based, and if you want audiences to engage, the information needs to be relevant to their lives.

Format of the story, length of videos, and algorithms all play a part in whether content will reach audiences, but there's no magic formula to guarantee success, they said.

"My team has this saying, that we should make things sexy," Travers said. "If we believe this international topic is super important, we'll try and make it interesting for young people following us. And at the same time, some things are super popular online and like, okay, if that's a popular thing, as you said, we should probably talk about it, but let's make it interesting and make it valuable for people."

Similarly, Leinonen said, "It's very important to talk about things that actually are affecting these young people's lives, or what they should know. It can be a really boring thing, in a way, on paper, but if it's about how it's actually affecting their lives, I think that's kind of the key."

And importantly, Baena said, success is not the same as perfection.

"You should be resourceful, and you don't have to be sophisticated in order to deliver a good message," she said. "That's something I think that blocks a lot of journalists and content creators, like you have to have this huge media outlet or this huge camera or a big team but perfect things are enemies of good things. "

Despite the need for more social media literacy among journalists and creators, participants saw the possibility of innovation as immense. And, as the roundtable concluded, participants expressed optimism about the future of journalism and digital content creation, and the ability of both to adapt to the digital age while maintaining journalistic integrity and promoting media and information literacy.

"Legacy media outlets usually don't have the skills to do social media content creation, like influencers/content creators would," Leinonen said. "And there's kind-of somehow a need to push them down in a way. But we need to note what they're doing and learn from it...But I think there's also some people who are scared because they can't really understand what is happening on social platforms, [so] then they think that, 'oh, we don't care about that, that's not journalism.' But I think that, as journalists, we can ... understand that we work on the same platforms and we...can't continue denying the impact."

Page said he hoped more content creators –and journalists–could understand and respect what the other does, noting that there need to be more trained journalists, and not just content creators doing news, on social media.

"It's important for journalists to become better content creators," he said.

The quality of information online depends on it.

2. Journalists and influencers united: The experience of the Youth Multimedia Room at #WPFD2024

Carolina de Assis



Moderator Adeline Hulin (left) from UNESCO leads a panel on climate awareness and literacy on social media during the World Press Freedom Day Conference in May 2024 in Santiago, Chile. The panel included activists and content creators, many of whom participated in the Youth Multimedia Room. Panelists left-to-right: Paulo Galvão (Brazil), Charlotte Brum Bezié (Mexico), Kassy Cho (UK), Francisco Vera (Colombia), and Selinä Nera (Finland). Photo by Arly Faundes B.

Five years ago — even one year ago — the idea that TikTok influencers would work alongside professional journalists to cover the environmental crisis might have seemed far-fetched. But not anymore. In May 2024, the World Press Freedom Day Conference in Santiago, Chile, became the laboratory for a groundbreaking experiment that could reshape the future of environmental reporting.

“It’s a really interesting paradigm shift,” said Charlotte Brum Bezié, known to her 880,000 [TikTok](#) and [Instagram](#) followers as @noseaswaste. Little did she know that her presence at the 31st World Press Freedom Day Conference would be part of a revolutionary approach to information dissemination.

The afternoon of May 2, 2024, an eclectic group of youth from around the world gathered at Santiago’s Pontifical Catholic University for a half-day of training to prepare them for their participation in the “Youth Multimedia Room.” This wasn’t your typical newsroom. Journalists rubbed shoulders with climate activists, while students exchanged ideas with social media influencers, or digital content creators. Their mission was to cover a high-level United Nations conference in ways never attempted before.

But why this unusual collaboration? In an era when traditional news outlets struggle to capture the attention of younger audiences, UNESCO and the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas posed a daring question: Could the synergy between journalists and digital

content creators revolutionize environmental reporting? Would the rigorous fact-checking standards of journalism clash with the engaging, personal style of influencers? Could these diverse communicators find common ground in their quest to inform the public about pressing environmental issues?

Over the next two days, a hybrid kind of multimedia storytelling emerged — one that blended the depth of traditional, fact-checked journalism with the reach and appeal of social media. But it wasn't all smooth sailing. There were sometimes frustrations and confusion over roles. Different styles of work and communication clashed and reconciled during the two days of activities in the youth newsroom. In the end, the understanding prevailed that journalists and influencers gain much more from collaboration than from competition — and these benefits extend to the audiences they serve.

This chapter delves into the challenges, triumphs, and unexpected lessons from this experimental newsroom. It explores the blurred lines between journalism and digital content creation, and questions how, in the face of global environmental crises, can this unlikely alliance help engage a new generation of informed citizens?

#WPF2024

The 31st **World Press Freedom Day Conference** — or #WPF2024 — addressed an urgent question: **how can journalism respond to the environmental crisis?**

The 2024 celebration, held annually since 1994, took place May 3-4 in Santiago, Chile. More than 2,000 people from 116 countries participated in more than 70 panels, lectures and workshops that highlighted the importance of journalism and press freedom in the context of the current global environmental crisis.

Amid the growing importance of digital platforms, for the first time, UNESCO, in collaboration with the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas, invited digital content creators —sometimes referred to as influencers — to participate in the coverage of this annual conference. It was an update to the “Youth Newsroom,” which UNESCO has organized since 2012 with young journalists and students covering major UN agency events.

The 2024 “Youth Multimedia Room” brought together 27 young communicators, including journalists, influencers, students, and climate activists, and five fact-checkers dedicated to verifying all the material produced in the coverage. The goal was to understand how journalists and digital content creators can work together and what they can learn from each other.



Journalists, student journalists, digital content creators, and activists in the Youth Multimedia Room worked 12-hour days to cover the World Press Freedom Day events in Santiago, Chile. Photo by Arly Faundes B.

A new paradigm

The theme for the 31st World Press Freedom Day Conference was “A press for the planet — Journalism in the face of the Environmental Crisis.” The idea was for activists and influencers who produce digital content about the environment and climate change to work alongside journalists.

“Digital journalists, content creators, and activists are having a growing impact on the dissemination of information related to climate and environment, reaching audiences that are diverting from mass media to rely on online creators as their main source of information,” UNESCO said on its website.

Bezié, who produces social media content about how to live and consume while generating less waste, called the newsroom experiment a “paradigm shift.” “Sometimes, in my prejudices, I can see that they [journalists] don’t take the work of content creators seriously, because they are ‘influencers.’ It’s beautiful to know that there is mutual respect and that there is space for everyone,” she said.

Bezié, from Mexico, was one of the influencers in the group of young communicators from South and North America, Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East who occupied the second floor of the Gabriela Mistral Cultural Center throughout the conference.

They first met the day before the conference at a workshop on misinformation and fact-checking. They learned about post-publication fact-checking methods, fact-checking tools, disinformation using artificial intelligence (AI), and disinformation about climate change.

The training was led by a team of fact-checkers from Lebanon, Jordan, Nigeria, Spain, and Chile, who were responsible for verifying the content produced by the young communicators.

“There are a lot of content creators who, in their day-to-day work, are not used to having their work reviewed by someone else,” said Spanish journalist Joselu Zafra, who works at

Maldita.es and was part of the fact-checking team. “I think having professionals do this gives them peace of mind, but we also like being able to participate in their content because it’s something very unusual in what we do as fact-checkers in our daily work.”

A content creator, Zafra pointed out, can be “a figure who motivates a lot of misinformation, who is even capable of contesting very established narratives, facts that are already verified.” As such, he said, content creators can learn from journalists to report truthful information and defend press freedom.

And journalists can learn from content creators how to pay more attention to their audiences, he said.

“The journalist, in principle, has no obligation to anything other than the public’s right to be informed,” Zafra said. “But he doesn’t have any applications in his day-to-day life to ensure that this is happening. Meanwhile, the content creator puts his effort and work into keeping an eye on whether his audience is doing well and is on the same wavelength as that person. The journalist could learn something from that.”

Content creators or influencers?

During the workshop on the 2nd, the coordinators of the newsroom — Arly Faundes, professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile; Lionel Brossi, professor at the University of Chile; and Summer Harlow, associate director of the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas — divided the communicators into groups, each with at least one journalist, one student, one influencer, and one activist.

While becoming familiar with each other and finding ways to work together, the young communicators reflected on the roles of journalists and influencers in the circulation of information in the digital environment.

For Elizabeth Sherr, or @lizlivingblue on Instagram, TikTok, X, and YouTube, digital content creators are people who share information and stories, for educational purposes or not, on social networks.

“As a content creator, I’m taking not just information from my life, but information that I learn online through news and science articles to help translate that in an easier way to understand that uses language that’s not so sciency, and more approachable for a general audience,” said Sherr, who describes herself as an ocean scientist, activist and storyteller.

A difference between digital content creators and journalists, she said, is the freedom that the former have to share their personal impressions in the content they create. “We can be really mad or really happy about a story, whereas journalists might have to hide those emotions sometimes. That’s something that’s cool about having the freedom of expression on social media,” Scherr said.

Shampi Anna, a climate activist from Kenya, also highlighted the role of emotions in the work carried out by digital content creators. She said she believes that journalists could incorporate emotion into their reporting to reach more people.

“Traditional journalism is usually so serious and formal,” she said. “There are feelings attached to digital content creation. There are emotions, either happiness, sadness, or whatever the content is about. If journalists would also focus on the emotions of the people they’re reporting about, and bring out stories to have feelings like that, I think it would be good.”

Brazilian activist Amanda Costa, founder and executive director of [Instituto Perifa Sustentável](#), disseminates information about climate change to her 28,000 followers on [Instagram](#). For her, digital content creator and influencer are two different categories.

“A content creator is a person who studies, who uses information to be able to disseminate it to a larger audience. They have this role of translating information, regardless of the niche,” she said. “Not all influencers are content creators. A content creator actually creates content. The influencer is just showing aspects of his life and has no commitment to providing verified information.”

Thinking about the role of journalists today is a more complex task, and the precarious nature of information work also affects content creators, Costa said.

“The profession of journalism, which is extremely important, has been saturated. This place, so important to society, is being scrapped. In the past, content production was carried out by journalists, scriptwriters, cameramen, and editors. Today, all of these professions go to one person, who is the content creator, who is also exhausted, anxious, and facing several challenges.”



Amanda Costa, a climate activist and content creator who is the founder and executive director of Instituto Perifa Sustentável in Brazil, showed off her press pass to cover World Press Freedom Day events in May 2024 as part of the Youth Multimedia Room. Photo courtesy of Amanda Costa.

Journalists can learn from content creators to be more flexible and spontaneous, Costa said. And content creators can learn from journalists to have more depth.

“It is very important to study, investigate facts, understand the news beyond the headline, beyond the superficiality. From my interaction with journalist friends, I realize that they have a very deep commitment to the truth, while a content creator sometimes shares fake news without realizing it. This care with fact-checking is one of the points that content creators can learn from journalists,” she said.

Colombian activist Francisco Vera, who has almost 840,000 followers on his [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [X](#) profiles, said he uses social media as a “loudspeaker.”

“My work is activism more than content creation, and social networks serve as amplifiers for me,” he said. “In other words, social networks are not the end, but one of the means, because I also do political advocacy. I have the movement and I have social networks. There are several ways to broadcast a message.”

Vera, who at the age of 13 was named by UNICEF as the [first young advocate for the environment and climate action](#) for Latin America and the Caribbean, focuses his social media content around climate justice and human rights, especially the rights of children and adolescents to a healthy environment. He highlighted the importance of being careful with the credibility of information shared on social networks.

“Regardless of whether someone is a content creator or a journalist, I believe that it is an ethical responsibility of citizens not to pass on false information or information based on less credible or invented sources,” he said. “That’s not just what you do as a journalist or me as an activist or any other person, but each person must be responsible for what they share. It is a collective responsibility.”

Challenges and lessons

The two days of journalists, influencers, activists, and students reporting alongside each other resulted in 30 articles published on the [Youth Multimedia Room’s official website](#), 20 video posts on social media from UNESCO’s Media & Information Literacy initiative ([@unescomil](#)), a video published on [UNESCO’s Instagram profile](#), and at least 50 videos posted on newsroom participants’ own social media accounts.

The experience also offered valuable lessons for those who worked across the new communication universes.

“What I learned from digital content creators and what I’m still learning is how to create more engaging content, how to approach the audience, how to engage them better,” said Bosnian journalist Haris Buljubasic, host of the [AJB Start](#) program on the TV channel [Al Jazeera Balkans](#).

He said he doesn’t believe in competition between influencers and journalists. “I don’t think that an influencer is more trustworthy than a news outlet, so I don’t think that we are competing at all. And, as journalists, we are arrogant enough to think that nobody competes

with us,” he joked.

Generally the group had a good working dynamic, but it was still a challenge, Buljubasic said.

“Obviously, the influencer is a bit, you know, out there, trying to be in the center, to be in all the pictures and videos. That’s an issue with influencers and content creators. It’s about them mostly. They want to be in the center, in the focus, because that’s what makes them an influencer. But as I said, they know how to produce engaging content,” he said.

Bezié, who is a publicist by training, had never collaborated with journalists until her experience in the multimedia newsroom.

“Something that happens with content creators or influencers is the fact that we give a lot of personal opinions. ‘I think this,’ ‘I think that,’ ‘this makes me feel happy or sad.’ And something I just learned that has grounded me is that journalism is neutral: ‘These are the facts. This is what happened,’” she concluded.

She said that at many times it was a “frustrating” process, as she had to adapt her way of working, as she usually does everything alone and had to incorporate the group’s contributions. However, this same process made her feel validated by her reporting colleagues.

“Normally, I don’t script the videos, I just talk,” she said. “This time, I first had to write the script so that the data could be checked by the editor and then it had to go through the fact-checking team. Thus, I felt doubly validated, with the journalistic team and the fact-checking team. I leave with a lot of reflection and a lot of responsibility. Yes, I feel more responsible.”

Trinidad Riobó, who was about to graduate in journalism from the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, said the experience in the newsroom helped her learn new ways of transmitting information.

“At least for us at the [Pontifical Catholic University], we are taught in a very specific way to transmit the news, perhaps very focused on the media, which is a more traditional way of sharing information,” she said. “People read much less, they spend much less time focused on one thing. So I think [journalists] can learn to find new ways to convey information in a more attractive way.”

However, unlike Buljubasic, Riobó said she believes that there is competition between journalists and digital content creators. Competition is not necessarily a bad thing, though, she said, since traditional journalism is falling behind.

“Ultimately, traditional media is not up to par, so to speak, with new audiences,” she said. “What I consume most is content from content creators. Therefore, I know that it is something very attractive, that we have to adapt, and I think that is why there is competition. But I also think that’s a good thing, because it challenges journalists to find new ways of doing this. And I also think that as long as there is still good journalism, content creators will also be challenged to have good content.”

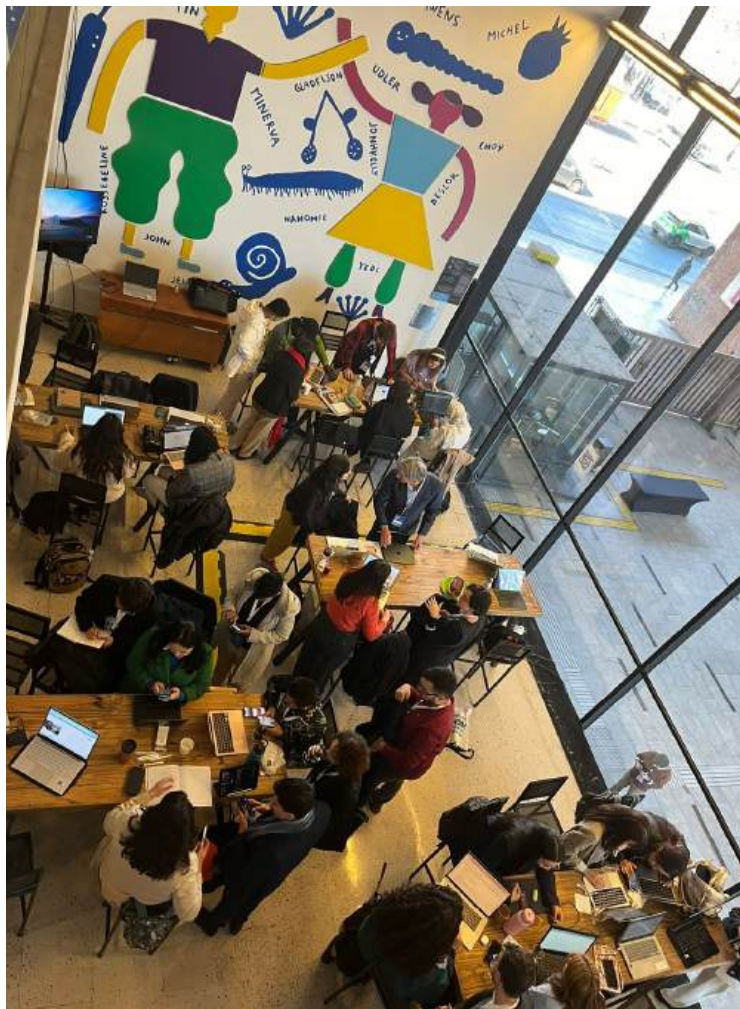
An influencer journalist

One of the participants in the Youth Multimedia Room group lives in both worlds with ease and has a lot to say about how journalists and digital content creators can work together and learn from each other.

Kassy Cho, based in Taiwan, describes herself as “a journalist and audience strategist pioneering a social media-first approach to growing young audiences.” As audience development editor at BuzzFeed News between 2017 and 2019, she was among those responsible for growing the media outlet’s presence on social media.

In 2020, Cho founded *Almost*, an outlet dedicated to covering international news whose main channel is [its Instagram profile](#). *Almost*’s target audience is young women, and all of its reporters are under 30 years of age.

“I consider myself a journalist, first and foremost, but also a digital content creator,” Cho said. “Journalism nowadays is not just focused on TV or newspapers. In order to reach young people, we have to be creating digital content on social media platforms. It’s not a great idea to separate them. At the end of the day, we’re all telling stories and sharing information.”



Participants in the Youth Multimedia Room used the Gabriela Mistral Cultural Center in Santiago as their homebase. Photo courtesy of Arly Faundes B.

Cho said she always encourages news organizations and traditional journalists to look away from what other journalists or outlets are doing and pay attention to the content their target audience consumes on social media.

“As journalists, we tend to get into this tunnel vision or echo chamber situation where we just look at what other journalists are doing, and then we just copy that. But in order to really create content that our audience wants to engage with and really connect with, we need to do it in ways that feel natural to them,” she said. “We can’t expect people nowadays, especially young people, to open a computer, open their browser and then type ‘www dot New York Times dot com’ into their browser search bar and then read the news. People are spending time on TikTok and Instagram. And they’re looking at content from content creators and influencers.”

According to Cho, the team that makes Almost applies “rigorous journalistic standards” to all content produced: they investigate and verify information and write the scripts for the videos and the texts for the posts. To deliver this content to the audience, they use formats similar to those used by young content creators on social media.

She said she believes young audiences want to receive content from someone they can see and identify with, “instead of this faceless news corporation that’s just shoving news at them.” She rejects the rivalry between journalists and content creators and suggested that journalism embrace these new communication actors. “I think we should lean into that. And just for example, I think traditional media could hire more young people and digital content creators,” Cho said. A big problem is that social networks are platforms controlled by private companies, which make decisions about how content circulates without being accountable to the public. Cho acknowledged that media outlets that invest in these platforms depend on an algorithm, over which they have no control, to access their audience. BuzzFeed News itself saw its audience drop significantly when Facebook changed its priorities, she said – and in May 2023 it [even closed its journalistic operation](#).

“It’s really difficult for new digital media to be around due to how the world has been structured in terms of platforms and the power that platforms have over media, which is definitely a problem. But unfortunately, that is what we are stuck with at the moment,” Cho said. “Right now, young people are spending time on TikTok, so we’re going to be on TikTok because we need to meet them where they are.”

It is crucial to prioritize young audiences when addressing the future of journalism, Cho said. Young people are avoiding the news not because they don’t care about what’s going on around them, but “because we’re not listening to them and not presenting things to them in ways that make sense. And that involves really understanding the audience and not just through digital content creators, but through actual, real life young people,” she said.

“If we want to solve this problem of news and sustainability, then we need to incorporate our future audience in this. We can’t be the ones making decisions for them and about their future.”

3. Lessons from a new type of joint newsroom: A first-hand perspective of how journalists, content creators, and activists can work side by side

Arly Faundes B.



Arly Faundes B., associate professor at the College of Communications at the Pontifical Catholic University of Santiago, Chile, was part of a large experiment to create a newsroom with journalists, digital content creators, activists, and journalism students to cover the events of World Press Freedom Day, in May 2024, in Santiago, Chile. Faundes served as one of the newsroom coordinators. Photo courtesy of Arly Faundes B.

The youth newsroom in charge of covering World Press Freedom Day in Santiago, Chile, can be defined as young, diverse, happy, proactive, multimedia, and truly international. It was a group of more than 30 young people from different parts of the world, such as Mexico, Spain, Brazil, Kenya, Colombia, the United Kingdom, and Chile, among others, and included journalism students, content creators (or influencers), activists, and fact-checkers, who came to the Chilean capital to cover the commemorative event held May 3 and 4, 2024.

Four journalism professors were in charge of this mission. It was a journalistic newsroom unlike any other that I had previously worked in. This is because for influencers and activists, it was something new, and sometimes confusing, to be part of a journalistic newsroom, with journalistic rules and processes, and even fact-checking. And, on the other hand, for the journalists and journalism students, it was also something different to work with influencers and activists and to consider them “content providers,” like them. And of course being part of a two-day reporting project that was practically 24/7 was a challenge that could not be explained unless you experienced it.

What happened in the course of these days– a joint newsroom and conversations around coverage of events and content produced by journalists and influencers– undoubtedly represents a global phenomenon that is taking over digital media and social networks, especially. Influencers take over spaces previously dominated by traditional media and journalists to explain different phenomena and make sense of daily events. Meanwhile, journalists try to imitate the ways of communicating that we see from content creators to reach consumers and digital users with less and less time to consume information and at the same time with more and more alternatives to choose from.



Participants in the Youth Multimedia Room came together May 2 at the College of Communications at the Pontifical Catholic University of Santiago, Chile, for a disinformation and fact-checking training session, prior to covering the 2024 World Press Freedom Day events. Photo by Arly Faundes B.

To coordinate coverage of World Press Freedom Day events, we divided newsroom participants into six groups, in addition to the fact-checking group that worked in parallel to the reporting and production of stories. Within each working group, which had to cover a thematic track of the event, there were at least one or two journalism students or professional journalists and a content creator and/or activist. This mix was essential to achieve a convergence of the work of all types of communicators and content creators: journalism students contributed with editing and knowledge of the practice of journalism, writing, and sourcing; influencers with attractive formats to communicate news and interviews through new formats on social networks; and the activists had great knowledge of the issues and of the people attending the events.

To create a level playing field in terms of knowledge for all the participants and to explain how the teams would work throughout these two days and how each group would operate within the newsroom, there were two prior sessions of online inductive work on multimedia journalism, as well as a half-day of training in-person. This was complemented with training in the area of fact-checking. Given the complexity of what we were going to do and the large group involved, without these sessions it would have been very difficult to arrive prepared. Meeting each other in person was even more exciting since we went from many online screens to real people, in the flesh.

During the event, pitch meetings were held with each group to decide which World Press Freedom Day sessions to cover. Thus, the story ideas arose from the groups of journalists and influencers, with some being in charge of writing the articles and others in charge of the more audiovisual part. Due to their knowledge, in most cases, the influencers or content creators took charge of the audiovisual content, like reels and stories for UNESCO's Instagram account and the influencers' and activists' own accounts. The journalists were in charge of writing articles for the website UNESCO created especially for the youth newsroom, in addition to the X posts (tweets) that were also endorsed by the UNESCO editorial team.

It is important to emphasize that although the roles were divided from the beginning, as the hours passed, the groups became more flexible and collaborated on tasks according to the needs that arose and the events that had to be covered. Of course, the content always had



Newsroom participants were visited by the undersecretary of the General Secretariat of the Chilean government, Nicole Cardoch, during the World Press Freedom Events in Santiago, Chile. Photo courtesy of Arly Faundes B.

to go through the designated editors, then the coordinators (that is, us, the professors), then the group in charge of fact-checking before finally the UNESCO editorial group posted the content online. Many times, if not all, the content returned to the hands of the editors after fact-checking, which made the work last longer than either journalism students or content creators had imagined, and which was often frustrating for them. Many times, participants had to confirm names of people who appeared in videos or look for additional sources of information. This is how they learned about the rigor of on-site journalism with real deadlines. The days in the newsroom began in the morning, very early at 8 a.m. and ended at approximately 7 p.m.

Working with a group of young people passionate about communications was undoubtedly a privilege, to which was added the possibility of sharing with young people who came from different places from around the world. Content creators, also known as influencers, contributed especially in how to generate content, in finding attractive formats for social networks, and in being able to understand that digital communication is constant and omnipresent; that is, it is mobile. Each of them brought their own cell phones and a microphone – generally a lavalier or lapel microphone – to every event and many managed to interview important conference speakers, from international authorities to journalist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Maria Ressa, or Chile’s Minister Secretary General Camila Vallejo.

On the other hand, journalism students contributed with a deeper knowledge of journalistic writing and the news approach to coverage. This is how there was positive coordination between both creators and journalists, with the latter being the ones who assumed the role of editors and coordinators of the groups.

For content creators, or influencers, the biggest challenge was understanding journalistic language, understanding publication times, and the organization of work within a team. Plus, they learned that not everything they saw or covered was published; rather, what they recorded had to be edited and fact-checked, and they didn’t work alone, as many were accustomed. This was all something totally new for them, which meant things took longer than they were used to. On the other hand, the language and narrative structure of the influencers’ publications is different from that of students and journalists, mainly because in the case of influencers, they tend to be more protagonists of the coverage and in the case of students and journalists, they tend to put the focus on others, on the news, and not on themselves or their opinions. They were able to overcome this challenge by working together with journalists and journalism students, as creators were able to listen to journalists’ ways of working and get involved with the work teams.

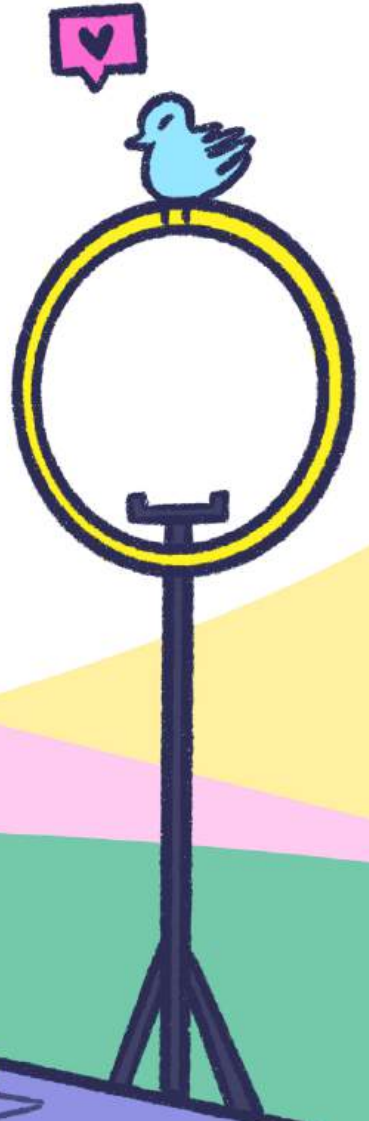
The takeaway from this mix of communicators working together was, on the one hand, for the influencers to learn about journalistic formats, to learn to ask themselves why something should be news, to understand that a journalistic article is not based on an opinion but a fact, and of course, to learn about fact-checking and the effort and time it involves. On the other hand, journalism students were able to learn from their fellow influencers or content

creators the importance of an attractive narrative structure that, for example, always starts with a hook and that challenges social media users to be participants in what is being told. Furthermore, the desire to participate and be at all the events, to be in the field, was undoubtedly a learning experience for them. Finally, it could be seen in practice, how in groups like these, content creators and journalism students were able to solve problems of the moment regardless of their diverse backgrounds and also focus on the objective of their task and what each person could contribute. A good example was when a group was covering a panel and the microphone they were carrying for an interview they had already scheduled did not work. They asked for help from another group through a general messaging app. That group supported them with a simple solution: using someone's headphones as a microphone. On another occasion, a panel ran over time and a journalist could not get to another panel to record, as planned, so another colleague replaced her without problem. That was pure camaraderie.

As the hours went by, the newsroom became not a sum of small work groups but rather one large group working together. Nor was it an aggregation of activists, journalism students, and influencers, but a mixed group of communicators and many friends with a common goal: to spread the word about the importance of press freedom. In the course of these three days, they reported together, shared occasional walks together, and enjoyed typical Chilean food together.

At the end of the day, many of them interviewed each other, wanting to know what it meant for each of them, in their different cultures, languages and businesses, to experience press freedom. Ultimately, what they were taking back to their homes and places of work or study were the on-the-ground understandings of freedom of expression, on-the-ground learning about the practice of multicultural journalism, and the power to hear from many authorities and experts regarding the importance and challenges of press freedom. The truth is that it did not matter much if they came as influencers, activists, or journalists, but rather why they came, which was to learn, know, and share their own knowledge.

Part 2: Up Close and Personal with 'Newsfluencers' from around the World



4. The ‘News Daddy’ of TikTok: Dylan Page and what it means to be a content creator in a journalistic sphere

Excerpts from an interview with Dylan Page



Dylan Page, a.k.a. News Daddy, who participated in the roundtable in April 2024 in Austin, Texas, has the leading news account on TikTok. Photo courtesy of UNESCO.

At the forefront of the name “News Daddy” is humor. It’s a joke. When I was first making videos, people just started commenting, as a joke. They saw I was doing news stuff, and were like, “oh, thanks newsdaddy.” And I thought, number one, it’s hilarious. But number two, people will remember that. A lot of the time, people don’t remember names. Who’s going to remember Dylan Page? So I thought, you know, that can become the brand of the channel, because I think it symbolizes what I do. News often can be seen by the public as quite serious and formal, but then you throw the “daddy” in there, and that lightens things up. I want to be able to touch on serious topics, but I also don’t want to lose the lighthearted, fun side of news, which I enjoy doing the most. So, it stuck, and it has become the brand name. Now I’ve got a company under NewsDaddy, our accountants and lawyers have to say that name everytime, so it’s pretty funny.

News Daddy came about half accidental, half intentional. It was the end of the pandemic, and my girlfriend and I were traveling in Australia. We knew we needed a job we couldn’t get fired from, because if we got fired while in Australia, there’s no government support, and

we'd have to book a flight back to the UK. So, we were like, okay, cleaning is the only thing that can't be taken away from us. And we did that, we had a cleaning business. But on the side, I really wanted to do something that I truly enjoy. I knew that I wanted to do content creation around news. I started doing that around May 2021. Now it's about three years later, and I have 10.7 million followers, the biggest news account on TikTok, and 4 billion views and growing— something like that. I don't even keep count anymore of that. It has been a wild journey. I'm working every single day to ensure that my videos are of high quality, so that part of it is intentional. But the fact that I'm here now is just the beginning. We don't know where we're going to go in the future either.

Building trust, creating appeal

Consistency is probably the number one reason I've had so much success so far. A lot of people can make good videos, but can you make good videos every single day for three years and make them two or three times a day, ensuring that the quality is always high? Whenever something big happens, people know they can count on Dylan to be speaking about it, and speaking about it not just like, "Oh, this is what happened," but having an interesting take on it.

I spend the most time on my scripts, and that's the one thing I've never wanted to give away. You have to make sure you have a competitive advantage, or you have something that you're really good at. Make sure that you stick with that and don't just hire people so you can scale further. I've built a lot of trust. I don't try and act like an authority telling people what they should believe or how they should make up their mind on the situation. I want to orchestrate it in a way where it's like we're looking at what's happening together, rather than the other way around, where you're just being told something.

Unfortunately, a lot of people think that's what's happening with traditional, mainstream media — that they're just being "told." Young people, especially, a lot of times see mainstream media as a little bit authoritative, where it's like "it's this, or nothing else." Right or wrong, it doesn't really matter, because that's the perception that's being created. If you've looked at my videos, you'll see I even created a visual representation of this — when I'm referencing another source, I don't look at the camera, but I make sure that I'm looking down and pointing at the screen, so that visually you can see this is not coming from my brain. I'm referencing a source, another entity where this information has come from. So that really does illustrate that I realize I'm not the smartest man in the world who has every piece of information. I'm giving credit to what's out there, and then you can decide whether you like this or find it credible.

I have a knack for just having passion about the topics that I speak about, which maybe makes things fun and makes things interesting. But I think that's something that journalists could focus on. You want to appeal to young people, because if you just leave all the young people, another group will step in, and they might not be the best group to be informing the young people. So, it's almost like a journalist's responsibility not to be dismissive and be like, "This is not the stuff that we want to create," but it's their responsibility to see the Gen Z's

and realize they still need quality information in whatever format gets it to them. We can't change what they want to consume. We maybe have to adapt and find the best quality for them, because if we just completely step back, who knows what will step in to fill the void.

When I first started out, I didn't read a lot of print. I got my news from social media. But keep in mind, when I started this, I was at the age of about 21 or 22, and I wasn't all that interested in news. When I started making videos, I was only talking about non-news-related stuff, like: Why does every single house in Bermuda have a white roof? You know, those sorts of things where it's just interesting. But then, as time has gone on, it's been more news-related. Now, a lot of the news that I consume is from a lot of mainstream media. I do have other sources — accounts on X, for example, have a lot of good independent journalists. But now, I would say that the majority of my news consumption comes from mainstream sources that I then take away and research independently.

I know that I'm on the content creator side, and that a lot of people might think I see mainstream media as the competition or that I'm against them. But I genuinely think that mainstream media, or legacy media, get a bad rap for how a lot of people think they're biased. A lot of the stuff that I read, I read it with a lot of respect, and I'm like: They're doing really well, and they're the ones actually sourcing this information. So, I do have a lot of trust in most mainstream sources. But again, you know, they're all just made up of people, and people are people in the end. So, some news sources can definitely be less reputable than others and that's why I always think that everyone should do their own research when learning about an important event or controversial topic.

For me, part of the distinction between journalists and content creators has to do with who is sourcing the information. I'm a content creator. But if I was actually sourcing and contacting people and uncovering a story myself, I would consider myself more of a journalist. Whereas right now, I see myself more as like a Google entity. I'm not the source of this news; I'm just almost acting as the collector and then picking out what's relevant and what people are interested in. And that happens to be in the news sphere. So people do look at me and wonder, "Is he a journalist?" But I really try and stand my ground: no, I'm a content creator.

I think it's important to recognize that there are people putting their lives on the line — literally — to source this information. When I'm all safe in my studio and I'm doing research on a topic, I don't have to worry about the government attacking me or, you know, some billionaires who hold the contracts for these certain companies, worrying about the information that I'm gathering. I think a lot of content creators that do news won't necessarily appreciate that. They'll take all of the credit. I can say, "Oh, I've got 10 million followers and this and that." But I think that I'm standing on the shoulders of giants — the people and organizations that have been doing this for 150 years. And so it's recognizing that and respecting that as I go forth, paying respect and crediting.

I don't claim to be a journalist. Still, I abide by all the same standards as a journalist, because, at the end of the day, I have an audience that trusts me for the information I present to them. And I would never want to mislead my audience. But as content creators, you always have

the temptation to exaggerate a piece, to maybe make it more of a compelling story because the views are what's driving you. I try to have a long-term vision of everything. Everything you do on every single day, you have to think, is this going to be good for you in 10 years time, or are you just doing it for that instant gratification of getting the views on the day? That can help guide you to sacrifice the little things that you could go wrong with. And as soon as people start realizing, "oh, this creator misled us on this, they misled us on that," you'll break that trust and you won't be able to do this consistently. And going back to why I think maybe I've been successful is because I've consistently chosen not to fall into that temptation because I have this long-term vision. The metric for success as a content creator, at least in the news sphere, is trust. It's trust and being accurate. I don't think you could be successful and present yourself as a news content creator without that.

Algorithms and platforms: A love-hate relationship

Having a dedicated audience that trusts you is important for helping you navigate algorithms and platforms, which can be very stressful since they change all the time. You have to understand that you're not always making content just for an audience — you're also making it for the algorithm, appeasing what this "God algorithm" wants you to do. So, you have to play by the rules, especially when you're first starting out. It's less of an issue for me nowadays, because I have a dedicated audience that, regardless of the algorithm, will come and watch my channel. But when you're first starting, you really have to think about the watch time. You're really having to think about the likes, the shares — is this something people want to share with their friends? And that can guide you with some of the stuff you want to talk about.

You learn what works through a process of trial and error. It's important to think about what the platforms can tell you, like TikTok in particular. You get feedback on where you're going wrong and where you're going right really quickly — the feedback loop is almost instant. That's what's very different from YouTube. You can ask a YouTuber, "How long did it take you to get started?" And some of them will say, "six or seven years before I got 1,000 subscribers," which is so long! You're posting a 20-minute video, and it'll get, like, five views. So the output for making a 20-minute YouTube video is just once, maybe twice a week. But with TikTok, you can post, and even if you have zero followers, it could still get millions of views. So, with no following at all, you can post a video, and if it's a good video, you immediately see what worked well. Then you can be like, "Okay, that's good. Let's replicate more of that." And if you post another video and it gets two views, you'd be like, "Let's stay away from that." You know, maybe you were speaking too fast, or maybe you were a little boring that day — whatever it might have been. Then, through a process of elimination, you really find out what's good and what's bad. TikTok is by far the most effective platform for that because of its algorithm. In the beginning, I was dabbling in Instagram and YouTube, but when things started really going well on TikTok, I focused just on that. There's this book called *The One Thing*, and it tells you: if you try to chase many things, you'll end up getting none. So, I really focused. I think TikTok is still going to be around in the next few years, and I think it's going to be the biggest app. There's something

so compelling about the algorithm mixed with news. If you post a piece of news content on YouTube, it could take days for it to reach the right audience and hit the algorithm.

On TikTok, I can post a video, and if it's something people are interested in, people will see it right away. I think the most I've gotten is about 600,000 views in 15 or 16 minutes. That's the algorithm on TikTok. So, it's the place to be for news. When I first started, no major news platform was acknowledging this. The landscape of making news on TikTok has completely changed since I first started. Because in the beginning, I could be the first to break news just sitting there in my room — I'd see something, think, "This is crazy," post it, and I'd get the most views. Now, the BBC is on there, the DailyMail, SkyNews, and they've got teams of 10 or 20 people. Which means now, when it comes to breaking news, it's harder for me to be the first one. I have to adapt and evolve. If I can't be the first all the time, how do I have a more interesting take? Where can I source other pieces of information that media outlets have forgotten about? I'm always trying to keep up, which is a good thing. I like the healthy competition because it keeps the news for the audience the best quality it can be.

Of course, we have to recognize that there's a dark side, too. We talk a lot about AI being dangerous and being scary, and one day it's going to be running our lives. For a long time on TikTok, my life and my career were literally being run by AI because I had no connections at TikTok. When I was making my videos, the algorithm — this AI, which has been trained by humans — would hear a certain word in my video or recognize a certain topic. For example, if I was talking about the situation in Gaza, and it would take it down immediately.

It's like TikTok is my boss. Imagine your boss being a computer and saying, "This is not going to happen today." All of the work that you put into that video, all the research — just scrap it. That's a full day's work worth nothing now and potentially an important event or topic that will not get seen. People would also ask why I hadn't made a video on what was going on, but I had. It would happen so often that it was affecting my channel massively. At one point, it was like four or five times a week that my videos would get taken down. That's huge; that's huge amounts of work, especially when you don't have a team, that is being taken down just because of this AI algorithm. They found certain things that they don't want getting pushed on their platform and deemed them problematic. So they took it down. And a lot of the time, it was unreasonable, and I would review it, get a human reviewer to try and watch it. And days later, it might get put back on. But days later, in news, as you know, it's too late.

And so I got so angry, I decided that's it. They wouldn't reply to me on messages or emails. I was scouring LinkedIn to find someone at the platform to contact. Every person that had any association with TikTok, we were emailing them, and none of them answered. It was pretty horrendous. So I thought, you know what, the truth shall set you free. I took all of this, made it into a video, and posted it online. It really made a big impact. And there have been a couple of times where I've done this, where I've had an issue and thought, you know what? There is a saying, where it's like, "Never waste a crisis." I've had all these times where my work has been taken down. I'm going to talk about it. And it turns out, a lot of other creators were feeling the exact same thing.

My video initially got about 10 million views, then other people, one with about 23 million followers, spoke about the same thing, and it started catching fire. So many people started talking about the same issues. And the next day after I posted — bear in mind, it's been months of trying to contact them — the next day after posting, three people from TikTok reached out to me. Three people. And I thought, "Wow," because before that, they wouldn't verify me. And, you know, at this point, I had like 9 or 10 million followers — you don't get an account that large without being verified, without having any connections. You're just at the mercy of the algorithm, which doesn't make any sense.

I spoke to them. I would say they helped somewhat, but they couldn't do much in terms of putting my videos back up. They just said, "We're here. Contact us if you ever need anything." And I did, and they couldn't really do too much. So, in terms of the problem being resolved, maybe not, but I was able to draw a lot of awareness to the subject.

Since then, I've gotten a couple of group chats, organizing a few creators that have similar problems. And that's been really helpful, because we all share our experiences. You have one video get taken down, and they'll post it in the group chat and be like, "This is what's happening to me." Another person will share what their revenue is because that's another whole subject to get into. It's been really helpful to have other people, but it's certainly not at the scale which is meaningful yet. And this is where I really feel like there should be someone to create a space where a lot of creators can be together, because it is a lonely job and it's an isolated job. And when you're all isolated in your rooms making videos, I don't think that you can put enough pressure on companies that rely on you for their business, when they're doing stuff wrong. And I really do think that's something that in the next months, maybe years, I'll focus on. But it will be very important, and it will be very impactful.

The responsibility of content creation

My journey has been a very slow, gradual process. And I'm still learning and growing. Now I understand that what I post will be seen by millions of people every single day, and with that comes responsibility. I have zero journalistic background. I didn't really pay too much attention to the news, and still, I've made this platform. I've created this platform purely just by being self-taught. I didn't know anyone that could help me, didn't reach out to any other content creators — just in my room every single day — and today I have the largest news account on TikTok. That doesn't make sense, and it shouldn't make sense. It shouldn't be possible. I have been thinking about that a little lately because I think it's very easy just to get focused on the day-to-day of what I'm doing. I don't take a step back and think, you have created something here where you do have a lot of responsibility, and how have you got here, and where do you go from here?

Because I now have the opportunity to really scale, and the bigger you get, the faster you can scale, and you can employ people that can make it a more legitimate organization.

5. Charity Ekezie is changing people's mindset about Africa one TikTok video at a time: 'I can't stop until I pass my message'

Carolina de Assis



Charity Ekezie, who now has more than 5 million followers across her social media accounts, always wanted to be a broadcast journalist. She saw Youtube as allowing her to be on TV, "without really being on TV." Photo by @adesilola.

Did you know that iPhones grow from trees on the African continent? And to recharge a cell phone battery in Africa you need to plug the charger into a hippo's anus? And to have access to water, the residents of the continent come together to cry and fill a community pool with tears?

Obviously, none of this is true. If you don't get the joke, it's because you still don't know Cameroonian-Nigerian journalist and influencer Charity Ekezie – “Africa's queen of TikTok,” according to the African media group *Nation*.

Ekezie has 3.3 million followers on TikTok, 980,000 on YouTube, 570,000 on Instagram, and 377,000 on Facebook. These millions of people follow Ekezie for her videos that mock prejudices about the African continent. She makes her videos in response to strange comments and questions about Africa.

In addition to making videos to answer the questions “how do you buy iPhones in Africa?,” “how do you charge your phone?” and “how do you get water in Africa?,” Ekezie has also made videos answering whether there are houses, electricity, air conditioning, cars, and even the internet and TikTok in Africa. Her answers are always full of sarcasm, and manage to simultaneously inform the public about life on the continent and mock limited views about Africa and its inhabitants.

“I didn't start TikTok to dispel stereotypes about Africa,” said Ekezie, who started making videos for social media after failing to get a job as a TV journalist. She started using TikTok in 2020, after nearly six years of posting to her Facebook and Instagram profiles. On YouTube, she started posting videos in 2017, covering everyday topics such as hair care and making jokes in videos about her single life.

“I was just posting random stuff on TikTok, like on YouTube,” Ekezie said. “Eventually, when I started posting videos related to being African and living in Africa, I began getting crazy comments. That's when I decided to streamline my content to address stereotypes.”

Her creative process is based on feelings that arise when she reads an absurd comment or sees a video containing misinformation or spreading prejudices about Africa on social media.

“The ignorance gets me,” she said. “For example, I woke up this morning to a YouTube comment that really annoyed me. Here I am trying to educate someone about Africa, and then they are telling me ‘what you're saying is nonsense because I know Africa better than you, even though I have never been to Africa before.’ When I saw that comment, an idea came to my head of another video because I was already angry and wanted to respond to that person.”

Journalist by training

Ekezie was born in Nigeria, grew up in Cameroon and returned to live in her home country at the age of 10.

“Growing up, I've always been much of a talker,” she said. “I love to talk, I love to argue. I just love to speak my mind.”

This taste for expressing herself led her to study communications at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, in the city of Awka, Nigeria. She graduated with a degree in journalism in 2012.

“When I was a kid, I went to a friend's house and they had a very big mirror. I grabbed a newspaper – I didn't even know what it was saying – and I sat down, crossed my legs in front



Charity Ekezie at "The Greatest Party of All," an event hosted by Fifty Four Magazine in Mozambique in June 2024. Ekezie is a Nigerian TikToker and journalist. Photo by @rageincproductions.

of the mirror, and started reading it as if I were reading the news on TV. When I remembered that moment, I thought, 'Yeah, I think I was made to be a journalist,' and I knew I needed to do something in that field," Ekezie said.

Already trained as a journalist, she started working as a presenter at a university radio station. It was voluntary work, which she did for three and a half years as she could not get a job as a journalist elsewhere. Her dream has always been and continues to be to work on television, as young Charity imagined when reading the news in front of the mirror.

It was this dream that led her, in 2017, to start creating and posting videos on her YouTube channel.

"I was like, 'okay, there's this platform where I can get to be on TV without really being on TV and just express myself.' So I started a channel where I tried to talk about random stuff. I didn't really have any specific thing I wanted to do. I just wanted to learn how to be on TV," she said.

In 2020, amid the boredom of lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic, she decided to experiment with TikTok. The Chinese short-video social network that had been growing internationally since 2018 saw its popularity explode during the pandemic.

“Everybody was at home, we were all bored, and TikTok became more popular,” Ekezie said. “Everybody on social media was on TikTok. I was like, ‘let me just see what the hype is about.’ So I joined TikTok, I watched some videos and I was like, ‘what if I just try here as well just to be myself and see if people care about it.’”

People cared a lot. Unlike YouTube or Instagram, TikTok made the content created by Ekezie fly. She said she didn’t do anything different from what she did on other social networks, and yet the TikTok algorithm took her videos to audiences she hadn’t reached on YouTube, for example.

“I liked TikTok because I didn’t have to be fake. I didn’t have to live a fake life. It was like, ‘okay, I found the platform where I can be myself and nobody’s judging.’ I was just me and the algorithm just always knows how to pick on the videos that are funny. So I made funny videos and it blew up,” she said.

Ekezie was surprised to realize that her audience on the new social network came mostly from the Global North: Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Europe.

“What gives me the most joy is that I’m passing the message to the right set of people,” she said. “I have very few Africans following, meaning that I targeted the right audience and I got to them. I just set out to change the mindset of people about Africa one video at a time.”

Ekezie said she receives messages and reactions from people who watch her videos saying they love what she does or that they didn’t know “that Africa was like this.”

“It dampened down on some racism as well, because I got a lot of racism in the beginning,” she said. “But now people are like ‘thank you for showing us this side of Africa that they never show us.’”

Deconstructing stereotypes with humor

Nigerian-British journalist Hannah Ajala learned about Ekezie through TikTok and said she loved the simplicity and sarcasm of her videos. So much so that, in 2022, she wrote an article about Ekezie for the [Media Diversity Institute](#) website.

“A lot of my work in journalism, especially after having the pleasure of traveling around the African continent, is about challenging stereotypes,” Ajala said. For her, the narrative most present in Western media seeks to normalize the suffering of African people and does not explore the diversity of the continent.

“The continent has more than one billion people. Surely, they don’t live the same reality. So just seeing different layers emphasizes this versatility, how dynamic and incredible the continent is. And I learned so much about that from Charity’s content,” she said.

Ajala also noted that Ekezie’s videos are so successful because, regardless of the topic



Charity Ekezie at "The Greatest Party of All," an event hosted by Fifty Four Magazine in Mozambique in June 2024. Ekezie, who graduated with a journalism degree in 2012, said she doesn't think traditional news formats work well online. Photo by @esthermakauphotography.

covered, people like to laugh and have fun – and end up learning in the process.

"Anyone can go to her videos and feel entertained," Ajala said. "They have a wide appeal because they open up a conversation to those who are curious but will probably never ask silly questions, and they get to see it live and direct and have a better understanding. They also give you a different takeaway to what you're not used to seeing."

Chris Joondeph, a travel content creator on the @Authentic_Traveling profile on several social networks, also found Ekezie's videos through the TikTok algorithm. They started following each other and ended up collaborating on sarcastic videos on the social network, mocking those who think that **traveling in Africa is very dangerous** or that **Africa is a country and that its capital is Wakanda**.

"Many people don't even know that Africa is a continent of 54 countries; it's not one single country," Joondeph said. "I even, as a travel content creator, get questions like, 'What are the entry requirements for Africa?' and I'm like, 'What does that even mean? Each country? There are 54 countries. They each have their visa regimes and requirements to enter. How can you be asking me what are the entry requirements for Africa?'"

He also criticized the representation of Africa in Western media, which is more focused on problems than on the positive or even common aspects of the continent. Ekezie, however,

goes beyond showing these aspects, and uses sarcasm to convey her message. “You could make videos that show a great mall in Africa or a very developed office complex, which are not what people would normally see about Africa. But that would be boring if it was just shown in a straightforward way. What Charity does and makes her unique is the sarcasm element,” he said. “She uses humor to educate people about Africa and does it in a way that’s engaging and funny and shows the irony in some of the questions that people ask.”

Educate and inform with passion

Ekezie said that the mix of entertainment and information in her videos reflects her journalistic training.

“One thing about being a journalist is you have to educate, inform, and entertain, and technically I do the exact same thing in my content,” she said.

And she takes it seriously, taking care not to spread misinformation, even when she makes jokes. When she says that there are no cars in Africa and that people use wild animals for transportation, Ekezie does so by showing cars parked in the background, for example.

“As a journalist, I was trained to ensure that you tell the facts and only the facts. I make jokes, of course; that’s part of my videos. But even though I’m being sarcastic, I’m thought-provoking you to go Google or read or get more informed,” she said.

Ekezie’s success brought reflections on the relationship between journalists and digital content creators. For her, the ability to reach global audiences through social media is an opportunity that traditional journalists should embrace.

“We just have to get with the times,” Ekezie said. “We have to find a way to pass our message across because without us, actual journalists, doing this work, fake news can spread. Everybody can now pass whatever they want on social media. So we need you, as a journalist, to be able to focus and pass the right message so that people can see you as a pillar of trust.”

She believes that the key to capturing the public’s attention on social media is to deliver information quickly and engagingly. And she advises: “Go straight to the point. Make sure you capture their attention within five seconds or you lose it.”

For her, the traditional news format does not apply to digital news. It is important to transform the transmission of information into a conversation. “If you are trying to inform people about the latest happening in Congo, don’t make it like a news thing. Make it like: ‘did you know this is happening?’ That takes the interest of the viewer and they’re like, ‘oh I didn’t know this was happening in Congo’ and they’ll stay to the end,” Ekezie said.

Ekezie now lives in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, and makes a living from her work as a full-time digital content creator, mainly through partnerships with brands she advertises in her posts. At the moment, the only platform that remunerates its content based on views achieved is YouTube.

“Sometimes a brand approaches me and says ‘please advertise this for us on your TikTok and we’ll pay you,’ and that’s the only way I get revenue off of TikTok and Meta,” she said. “I can get a brand deal once in three months, once in a month... That’s how I’ve been sustaining myself up until I started getting paid on YouTube monthly off of my videos. That helped me have a monthly source of income.”

Ekezie said she found her mission on social media after years of creating content without a specific goal. Her videos deconstructing stereotypes about Africa come from “a place of passion,” and she doesn’t plan on stopping anytime soon.

“Nobody stops learning. Some people ask me: ‘aren’t you tired of doing this?’ I can’t stop until I pass my message. My followers have gotten the message, but I need to reach more people. Every day I go on social media and see people who still talk down on Africa, meaning that they’ve never come across my videos. So I can’t stop,” she said.

The dream of TV is still alive, but Ekezie aims for an international television platform to take her message to audiences who need to understand the diversity of the African continent.

“It could be anything,” she said. “It could be Netflix. It could be something just having my own show on an international platform level. I want to educate people and I can’t be telling Africans about Africa. We already know who we are.”



Charity Ekezie's satirical videos about African stereotypes allow her to earn a living as a full-time content creator. Photo by @adesilola.

6. Enrique Anarte and TikTok: The art of doing journalism for audiences that shun traditional media

César López Linares



Enrique Anarte is a lead co-instructor for an online course from the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas and UNESCO, called Digital Content Creators and Journalists: How To Be a Trusted Voice Online. Photo courtesy of Enrique Anarte.

It was the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, between March and April 2020. Enrique Anarte, originally from Huelva, in Andalusia, Spain, had been working as a journalist for three years at the Deutsche Welle network in Germany.

It was during one of many family video calls from his isolation in Germany that Anarte discovered TikTok: His brother's girlfriend introduced him to the app that people were using during lockdown to record funny videos, lip sync, and perform viral challenges. The two of them began experimenting with the tool, making their own videos.

"We were at home locked up," Anarte, currently 31, said. "Everyone did yoga here in Berlin—I hate yoga, it makes me nervous. We started doing things on TikTok, at first the stupid

things that everyone did. Then after a while she got bored, but I started making videos about political or social issues, or LGBTQ+ issues.”

Since adolescence, Anarte has been interested in issues related to human rights, politics, and the environment. Those issues, he said, were why he wanted to become a journalist. So, after opening his account [@enriqueanartelazo](#) on TikTok, he began to look for creative ways to talk about heavy topics, like Brexit, the difference between the European Council and the Council of the European Union, or some of the things he was learning from the graduate program in Law and European Politics that he was enrolled in at the time. For several months, he experimented with creating videos on these topics using entertaining, simple language, all while trying to connect with a social media audience.

Although at that time there were not too many people doing journalism on TikTok that he could turn to as an example, Anarte quickly realized which techniques and elements led to more views and interactions, and which did not.

“At that time, there were a couple of people who were doing things, some were using music, there were people who were starting to make explainers, but really everything was up in the air,” he said. “I was writing my master’s thesis and that was when I started to see how to tell these stories by simplifying things, seeing what worked and what didn’t.”

Anarte is an example of how journalists are finding in digital platforms new ways to tell stories that better connect with audiences that have turned away from traditional news media. His work using TikTok not only redefined his career path, but also is proof for how social media can be used to advance the mission of journalism.

A journalistic venture into TikTok

In October 2020, with many of its operations partially halted by the pandemic, Deutsche Welle opened its first TikTok channel, [@dw_berlinfresh](#), in a bid to reach younger audiences. Johanna Rüdiger, head of social media strategy for DW’s Culture and Documentaries department, learned about the content that Anarte was creating on his personal TikTok account and invited him to join the nascent TikTok channel’s team.

“I was really looking for journalists and content creators who either were already successful on the platform, and knew how the platform works, or at least that they were very open to it,” Rüdiger said. “I watched a lot of TikToks and I came across Enrique in my For You page and I thought he would be an excellent fit for our channel.”

Anarte said that, although [@dw_berlinfresh](#) mainly covered soft news, he found the challenge of joining the team interesting because the new channel gave him “a way of telling stories and connecting with the audience that was totally different from writing articles or producing a TV program.”

And little by little, Anarte was able to include the stories that interested him – about politics, social issues and sexual diversity. [The ban on blood donations from gay men, LGBTQ+ rights](#)

in Germany and the gay party scene in Berlin were some of the topics he addressed in his videos. One of the most rewarding achievements he remembers during his time on the TikTok team was when he and Rüdiger hosted Deutsche Welle's first live broadcast on TikTok, about the 2021 German elections.

After nearly two years making TikToks for Deutsche Welle, Anarte was hired by the Thomson Reuters Foundation to lead the team for **Openly**, a TikTok channel dedicated to LGBTQ+ content and the first TikTok channel for the journalism and press freedom organization. Meanwhile, Anarte began increasing the amount of content he was creating for his personal TikTok channel.



Enrique Anarte leads Openly, the Thomson Reuters Foundation's TikTok channel dedicated to LGBTQ+ content. Photo by Luigi Bencosme.

Connecting with audiences

In the time he has been using TikTok, Anarte has found the platform to be an effective way not just to communicate about the topics that interest him, but to bring them directly to people. That closeness and instant interaction with audiences that TikTok offers are essential for journalism, Anarte said, because of the way they promote transparency, diversity of perspectives, and credibility.

“[Journalism on TikTok] has led me to have a much more balanced relationship with the audience I reach, in the sense of diversity of perspectives, diversity of topics in terms of newsgathering,” he said.

This direct relationship with the audience on TikTok allows users to directly suggest topics he should cover that traditional media ignore, and in this way gives a voice to sectors of the population that are commonly left out of news stories.

“[Enrique] has interacted with and formed connections with contacts in the LGBTQ+ space across Europe, and even across the world. He truly gives a voice to those we might never hear from otherwise, and I find that so valuable,” said Hallie Rawlinson, a journalist from the social media team at Deutsche Welle, who was a colleague of Anarte. “Enrique is a great example of a journalist who fiercely embraced a new medium — one of which lots of his peers were afraid.”

Anarte said that one of the main lessons he has learned from doing journalism on TikTok is having his target audience in mind at every step of the creative process, from choosing an idea to creating the script and editing the video.

“That target audience is present at all times, as if they were there saying ‘this yes, this no.’ They are the people who give you feedback, instead of your editor,” he said. “It seems silly, but for me, that was a great lesson, because I didn’t have that training or that sensitivity, nor did I see that anyone around me had it, nor that anyone cared.”

In his videos, Anarte uses humor and satire as tools to tell stories and make them enjoyable for the audience. But at the same time, he knows that journalism standards of precision must always be present in his content, especially given the trust his audience has bestowed on him.

“What I like about him is that he understands the language of the platform and he knows how to do funny things,” Rüdiger said. “But he never sacrifices his journalistic standards for the sake of a joke, a viral sound or whatever. I really appreciate that.”

Anarte said that the humor and videos with skits or jokes that are typical on TikTok encourage the creativity of journalists to communicate important information in ways that are more attractive to audiences.

“Actually, what I’m doing is telling the news,” he said. “People are entertained, even enjoying it, watching it, and at the same time they learn. I didn’t have that in traditional journalism.”

The presentation of news in creative ways and the simplification that platforms like TikTok offer favor the democratization of information, Anarte said.

“If you don’t make content in a way that people can see it, consume it, interact with it, and understand it, you’re doing it for nothing,” he said. “When I’m there trying to explain the European Union, the freak who has written an 80-page thesis on the European Union doesn’t come out. The funny journalist who makes jokes comes out so that people have the opportunity to understand the European Union, because not everyone has the privilege of understanding it, even though it is something super relevant in their lives.”

Journalist by vocation



Enrique Anarte during the panel "The rise of news influencers: What journalists must learn" during the International Journalism Festival in April 2024 Perugia, Italy. Photo by Bartolomeo Rossi.

Anarte has practiced journalism since he was a teenager. He did not study journalism at university, but he always knew that he wanted to dedicate himself to telling stories and to have the possibility to talk about the topics he was passionate about: human rights, the environment, and sexual diversity, mainly.

At the age of 16, he began to write, first about typical feelings of that age, then small fiction stories that he posted on the then-nascent social networks: Facebook, Twitter, but above all Tuenti, which was the most popular social network among young people in Spain at the time.

"I knew that I wanted to say something and social networks were the platform that existed at that time," he said.

Also around that age, he began reporting on environmental problems in his native Huelva. He published texts in blogs and student newspapers until, years later, he wrote contributions for international media, such as Vice and The Huffington Post.

However, Anarte decided not to pursue a career in journalism after a conversation with a very close aunt, who was a journalist for regional television in Andalusia.

"She told me 'look, you're not going to learn anything in journalism.' As clear as that. She told me, 'Maybe you'll learn a little about how things work in theory, but you're not going to learn what you need to be a journalist. You're going to learn that when you start working,'" Anarte said. "In the end, she was a person that my parents trusted, that I trusted. And it was a very strong argument."

Anarte then chose to enroll in the Humanities and Translation and Interpreting degree in the city of Seville, because he wanted to have a global perspective and perhaps work abroad. From a very young age he learned languages. He studied in a bilingual French-Spanish school from the age of eight and his mother was a French professor, so he spoke that language fluently. At the same time, he took private English classes and when he entered university, he chose to learn German as his fourth language. However, after a year in Seville, he transferred to the Complutense University of Madrid to study International Relations. He graduated in 2017 and that same year he began a master's degree in European Union Law and Policy.

"I was interested in that topic and in why people don't understand it, in how the media get it so wrong and when they explain, people don't understand it," he said.

His studies at the university and his knowledge of languages were key to making his way in the news business, first as an intern at Deutsche Welle in Germany, then as an intern at the Paris office of Agencia EFE, and later in a six-month internship at the Reuters office in Madrid. After some failed attempts to find employment in Madrid, in 2017 he was hired by the Spanish section of Deutsche Welle, first writing about human rights and politics in Latin America, and then as a multimedia reporter in the network's television department.

"Everything I have learned in journalism I have learned working," he said.

Content creator or influencer?

It was not until the end of 2023 that Anarte realized that, for many of his followers and colleagues, he had converted from a traditional reporter to what is known as an influencer on social media. That is, a digital content creator with the ability to influence his audience in one way or another. The Openly TikTok channel Anarte leads has more than 250,000 followers, while Anarte has more than 64,000 followers on his personal account. Although he never thought he would become a social media content creator, Anarte realized that in the time he has been making TikToks, he has managed to establish a personal brand on the platform, something that influencers struggle to achieve to distinguish themselves from the huge number of creators on the internet. Still, Anarte admitted he is not 100 percent convinced he's an influencer, but acknowledged that he has consolidated an identity that is a combination of content creator and journalist on social networks. Anarte sees these two facets of himself as interrelated, but also clearly differentiated.

"I think that's what people see in me: 'this person works as a journalist, has journalistic values, but he's talking like the rest of the people on TikTok talk, like just another person,'" he said.

Currently, people can trust a content creator more than a journalist, Anarte said. For him, audiences are increasingly transferring their trust from traditional media to content creators, which, he said, is a stark symptom of the credibility crisis in journalism.

"'Journalist' is a reviled word. People only use it when it suits their ideology. The conflict in Israel and Palestine makes it very clear: people do not trust until they are told what confirms

their opinion. Suddenly journalism has become an instrument in favor of one ideology or another,” he said.

Anarte noted that the trust the audience places in social media personalities is a double-edged sword, especially considering that many content creators don’t follow clear ethical or journalistic standards, which makes it all the more important for journalists to reflect on what this transfer of trust represents for the future of the media or journalism, he said.

“The element that interests me most about all this as a journalist is, ‘why do people trust me?’ They don’t know me, although they think they know me. They trust me because I do certain topics, but sometimes I think, ‘what happens if a person who does really cool things suddenly shares things that are false, or that only contribute to polarization? What does that mean for the information ecosystem?’”

Personality and looks undoubtedly help gain the sympathy and trust of people on social networks, Anarte said. But that doesn’t mean that only attractive and outgoing people can succeed on those platforms. In fact, he said, TikTok has turned that paradigm on its head, and has allowed creators of all body types and personalities to find their niche audience.

“This totally breaks the idea that to be a creator you have to be a young, traditionally beautiful, extroverted person,” he said. “Obviously they are things that help. But the cool thing about this format, and why I think TikTok exploded and revolutionized the creation and distribution of content, is because there really are perspectives now that weren’t there before. There are people you don’t see on television, even people you didn’t see on Instagram.”

For Rüdiger, who also has her own TikTok channel specialized in migration in Germany, what makes Anarte connect with his audience is that he is a creator backed by the rigor of



Like so many others, Enrique Anarte, from Spain, got started making videos on TikTok during the pandemic. Photo by Luigi Bencosme.

journalism, but at the same time he is “very fun to watch, and cute and relatable.”

Rawlinson said her former colleague has developed exceptional skills in telling stories that are both informative and entertaining in a very short format.

“His ability to create valuable, engaging content is only matched by his enthusiasm for his beat,” she said. “I think Enrique’s style is a perfect mix of entertainment, inspiration, and elevating new voices.”

Anarte is passionate about the issues he works on, according to his colleagues. Rawlinson especially highlighted his knowledge of queer life and issues relevant to the LGBTQ+ population, noting that Anarte is the first person she turns to when she has questions about these issues. Although they no longer work together, Rüdiger said she is frequently in touch with Anarte to ask his opinion on video ideas or scripts. They have even collaborated on videos together.

For Anarte, what distinguishes him from other creators is that he has a very specific value proposition: he produces LGBTQ+ content in English, from Germany, with journalistic standards and with a global focus. Finding that unique perspective is one of the skills he tries to instill in the creators who attend the vertical video trainings he now teaches in several countries.

“When I train, I’m trying to increasingly incorporate that element of, not only teaching how to make TikToks, but teaching people how to be creators. I always tell them that people no longer go to the media, they go to the creators on social networks. What can you say that no one else is saying?”

7. Building a journalism project on social media: The *Almost* experience

Kassy Cho



Kassy Cho is an award-winning journalist and audience strategist pioneering a social media-first approach to growing young audiences. She is the founder and editor-in-chief of [Almost](#), an independent media outlet delivering global news stories for young people worldwide. She also offers courses and workshops about creating news videos for social media. Photo by Ikran Dahir.

I've been asked if I consider my job a form of journalism, or if I am an influencer sharing news stories on social media. My response is that I might be about social-first approaches, but I'm still a journalist.

If you're a journalist who wants to launch a professional project on social platforms, but you fear that doing so would mean you are moving away from journalism and the standards that the profession implies, then this chapter is for you. I thought it would be useful to share some of my experiences as editor in chief of *Almost*, the social media-first news startup focused on young people that I founded in 2020 with the intention of informing and empowering the future generation through news.

With more than 223,000 followers across platforms, and videos reaching 100 million views, *Almost* is outperforming traditional media outlets and changing the news landscape. But the

reality is that our *Almost* newsroom still operates very much like a traditional one. Every piece of content we create undergoes the rigorous journalistic process of research, seeking out sources to interview, reporting, fact-checking and more. Like all news outlets, our mission is to inform the audience. As such, we dedicate a lot of time to understanding an event or issue, figuring out how we can best explain it to our audience, and most importantly, how we tell the story. At the end of the day, journalism is about telling stories, and that's what we do, just in non-traditional formats.

Building an engaged audience

I'm a big believer in being audience-first. There's already a lot to be said about meeting your audiences where they are, rather than making them come to you. If they're on Instagram, then that's where you should be.

If they react positively to certain formats, then try to get better at those formats. And, as with any project you want to start, just try it out. The great thing about social media is that you can get real-time data about how the audience feels about something, which is great for experimenting with new ideas and formats. If it doesn't work, then you can try to approach it from a different angle, and then look at the data again to see if it works. If it works, then do it again. Rinse and repeat. It is through this iterative process that you can discover new formats and this is how innovation happens.

Working on social media, we're of course interested in looking at our reach; it's always a great feeling to see a video go viral. However, we're really more interested in how our audiences are engaging with us – for example, what news they are sharing to their own networks, what discourse they may be having in the comment sections, and what news they're directly asking us to cover. The impact we want to see is people thinking deeply, having conversations about the stories they're consuming, and spreading that to their own communities. We want to see



Kassy Cho worked as a journalist at QuickTake by Bloomberg and at BuzzFeed News before she started her Instagram-first news outlet, Almost. Photo by Meg Chen.

people connecting with others around the world, with issues they perhaps weren't aware of, and coming together to bring about positive change in their communities – big and small.

Building an engaged community can also be an important factor for achieving financial sustainability. For independent journalists, my advice would be to start building a network, a community of people who share the same goals and values as you do. This can include partnering with nonprofit organizations or educational providers, or crowdfunding through a loyal audience base.

Personal, authentic, empathetic, and verified

A good thing about doing journalism on social media is that we have the chance to be more personal with our public. Audiences trust us more when they know that there is a real, living, breathing person behind a story, instead of a huge, faceless news corporation shoving news at them. As journalists, our role is to tell stories, mostly about people, and being human and empathetic can make us better storytellers.

I am a big believer in authenticity when it comes to building a personal brand as a journalist. You need to establish a sense of trust between yourself and your audience, and one organic way to do that is to cover more stories that resonate with you personally. Find your beat, whether that's a region of the world (e.g. East Asia), or a certain issue (women's rights). Over time, your experience and insights will only make you a better journalist and, in turn, help you develop even more of a unique voice.

Establishing a more human connection with our public or our sources may be seen by some as a risk of falling into ethical conflicts. But I believe it is possible to be personal and connect with another person on a human level as a journalist while maintaining our objectivity, as long as we are aware of our own – and others' – biases, and ensure that we transparently take steps to address them and shed light on all perspectives around a story.

With social media, we can engage with our audience more quickly and actively, meaning we can directly and immediately address any concerns or inaccuracies in our work as we spot them, whether that is explaining our process to our audience in the comments, or issuing timely updates or corrections as the news develops. We cite our sources in our reporting so that people can verify the facts for themselves.

The platform conundrum

One thing that journalists who start a project on social media should be aware of is that social media guidelines do end up affecting our content creation, for both good and bad. We take the guidelines from social media platforms into consideration, such as recommendations about content styles and formats when we create our own content. We at *Almost* try to follow the guidelines to ensure our stories reach the largest possible audience. The guidelines can encourage us to be creative by working within certain constraints, such as keeping videos under 90 seconds.

But at the same time, as an independent outlet, we have been restricted or banned multiple times for sharing informative, original content that provides news value because platforms were unable to distinguish that it was news content. We are, first and foremost, a news organization, which means we have a responsibility to share the truth and all the necessary information with our audiences and not withhold information. For example, we abide by and respect guidelines to protect children from seeing harmful and fake content by blurring graphic content and creating content to debunk fake news. But the truth is, platforms like TikTok and Instagram need to do a better job at figuring out how to protect young audiences. Platforms have been unable to distinguish the difference between our news content and content intended to exploit or shock audiences, as well as the difference between our debunks of fake news and actual fake news. As a result, we have been forced to not share certain stories on certain platforms that may result in us being banned.

At *Almost*, we are social-first, but we are still journalists at heart. A big part of the job is to keep a balance between being as entertaining as social media demands, and keeping ethical and journalistic standards. Yes, we need to keep our content engaging, but that doesn't mean we need to compromise on ethics or standards. We use creative methods to tell stories, such as using compelling visuals to show what is happening (rather than just telling), or breaking down complex information into digestible formats. But for every story, we always stay true to our mission and values and ensure that we use data to inform, but not dictate our decisions.



Kassy Cho, from Taiwan, says that "at Almost, we are social-first, but we are still journalists at heart." Photo by Sofia Hou.

8. Two sides of a coin: Perspectives from a journalist and a creator

Catchy content still needs professional, ethical standards

*Haris Buljubasic**

I see a journalist as someone who is trying to figure out reality and pass it on to the audience in a professional manner. We are society's gateway to trying to understand what's happening around them. It's a huge responsibility, and I chose to be a journalist because I want to do something good for society. Journalists, like healthcare workers, are professionals that make the world better.

Platforms and algorithms define the digital space. To be a successful digital content creator, you must know the rules and play by them to reach the audience. You do need numbers to be an influencer, and that becomes problematic because you constantly try to entertain the audience and hook them on your content, sometimes with exaggerated or misleading information.

Digital content creators sometimes spread disinformation or information that a journalist would never release. They are not trained journalists, so I do not blame them. They must understand that they should think twice and do a little research before posting anything because many of them have hundreds of thousands of followers. And the audience needs to be aware that they are not journalists.

Creating engaging content comes naturally to them. We journalists can definitely learn from them how to approach the audience and engage them better. They could also learn from us about fact-checking, objectivity, giving context, researching, and writing properly.

During our experience in the Youth Multimedia Room, it was great to see how easily they create catchy content. They are not embarrassed to go around recording themselves. They have to give their best, especially if that's their source of income, and they have to tell the information in an entertaining, engaging way so that audiences will consume their content. I am a digital journalist, so I do a lot better [using digital technologies] than more traditional journalists, but they [digital content creators] are still at the next level.

**Haris Buljubasic is a digital content producer for Al Jazeera Balkans. He participated as a journalist in UNESCO's 2024 Youth Multimedia Room to cover the World Press Freedom Day conference.*

Content creation as a team effort

*Charlotte Brum Bezié**

A content creator is a person who is dedicated to making videos, photos, or articles with an important message, not necessarily something superficial. It is someone who specializes in a topic that interests them and aims for other people to learn or be informed with the content they are producing.

Having a platform where the information you are giving to the world is heard is a huge responsibility. We must take our role as communicators very seriously because with the messages we transmit, people generate ideas, critical thinking, and opinions.

As a content creator, I definitely learned from journalists how to provide reliable sources of information. I also learned to try to be a little more neutral and make it clear that my opinions are my opinions, and should not be taken as facts.

The experience at the Youth Multimedia Room was incredible. Now I want to have journalists on my team because I know we can create more powerful and in-depth content. I feel more responsible and safe when publishing that content because it has rigor. It gives me a lot of peace of mind and makes me very happy to have learned to work as a team.

It was very important to dare to ask. If I had stayed silent, alone, I wouldn't have made it because I couldn't handle this mission on my own. Many times we are told to do everything alone, and it is very painful to do it that way. It is a paradigm that we have to break. It is impossible to do everything alone.

I feel great satisfaction knowing that there is a common purpose between journalists, content creators, and activists, and that we are definitely stronger when we work as a team, when we listen to each other deeply, and when we genuinely seek something good to come out of our work.

I learned to work as a team with journalists and create content with a more journalistic approach, providing verified data and citing sources. I also discovered that journalists are very cool and have a lot of good ideas, and that together we make a great team.

**Charlotte Brum Bezié of Mexico is a digital content creator (@noseaswaste) whose social media content focuses on tips to create less waste and take care of the environment. She participated as a content creator in UNESCO's 2024 Youth Multimedia Room to cover the World Press Freedom Day Conference.*

Part 3: Content Creators and Climate Change



9. Navigating the role of a climate content creator in today's media landscape

Elizabeth Sherr



Liz Sherr, an activist and content creator, participated in UNESCO's Youth Multimedia Room, working alongside journalists and other activists and creators to cover World Press Freedom Day 2024. Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Sherr.

“**W**hat do you do for work?” is a question I had trouble answering in a way that correctly portrays my career or who I am. I’m a marine scientist with a European master’s degree in Marine Environment Resources, but I’m not currently working in research. I support ocean campaigns, but I’m not solely an activist. And while I’m a content creator, my focus is on sustainability, climate change, and the ocean — topics that don’t always fit the typical influencer mold.

My journey into content creation began during the lockdown of 2020. Stuck in my apartment in Spain, finishing my final semester of graduate school, I turned to TikTok out of boredom. I started making videos about sustainability, and to my surprise, some gained significant traction. In fact, one video about egg codes in the EU led to a job opportunity in Barcelona before I even graduated. I was so excited to move to the Mediterranean coast and continue living in Europe, but I was disheartened by the amount of trash I saw on the beach each morning. So, I began doing beach cleanups and documenting my efforts to raise awareness.

One day, I posted a video saying, “Every follower is a piece of trash,” which, though initially just for fun, became the start of a viral campaign I called the [#TrashChallenge](#). To inspire action, I invited my followers to join me in cleaning their own communities and report how many

pieces of trash they collected in the comments. This movement quickly gained momentum, catching the attention of the European Parliament who slid into my DMs on Instagram asking to collaborate on a similar campaign for World Ocean Day in 2021. Together, we mobilized people in over 30 countries to collect nearly **800,000 pieces of trash!** This experience opened my eyes to the power of social media — not just as a tool for spreading information about our evolving planet, but as a catalyst for impactful action.

Since then, my passion for sharing knowledge about and encouraging action for our ocean climate in a personal, engaging, and accessible way grew, especially as I saw the positive impact it had on the online community I'm building. Of course, I've also faced my share of negative feedback — trolls are an inevitable part of social media, and dealing with them is something I'm still learning to navigate. Now, when people ask what I do, I proudly say that my background is in marine science, but I channel that expertise into content creation (using science-backed information and research, of course!). Many content creators began their journeys during the lockdown, but what was once a side project has now become a full-fledged opportunity for many, particularly with the rise of remote work and the desire for more flexible, self-driven careers. It's exciting to see so many people channeling their passions into work that not only fulfills them, but also builds engaged communities around important causes— and we need many more to join the climate conversation!

The power and pitfalls of consuming climate information in the digital age



As an Innoceana collaborator, I was featured on the marine conservation nonprofit's "Underwater Show" to talk about plastic problems and solutions...underwater. Watch the short episode [here!](#)

Before the rise of social media, environmental information primarily reached the public through traditional news outlets, scientific reports, and documentaries. Access to these sources often required effort and a pre-existing interest in the subject, which meant that only a limited audience engaged with climate issues. Additionally, coverage of climate change was frequently influenced by political bias, leading to polarized narratives that either emphasized scientific evidence or downplayed the crisis altogether. Today, social media has changed the way we access and engage with climate information. While algorithms still contribute to polarization, the platform allows us to choose whose voices we listen to, whether scientists, activists, or everyday people. The open nature of social media also means that we're exposed to a diverse range of opinions and experiences, visible in the comments and interactions that accompany each post.

This shift makes social media a double-edged sword. On one hand, it's an incredibly powerful tool for disseminating science-backed information, highlighting solutions to environmental issues, and mobilizing communities to take action. On the other hand, it's also a breeding ground for misinformation (unintentional false information) and disinformation (deliberate falsehoods designed to mislead). These threats to collective climate action are often perpetuated not only by individual creators but by industries, like fossil fuels, that actively shape public discourse to their advantage.

A study from Boston University analyzed over 22,000 tweets spreading climate disinformation, identifying more than 60 ExxonMobil-funded accounts that promoted [false narratives about the climate crisis](#). These accounts pushed themes like "climate change is not threatening" and "Biden's energy plans hurt economic growth," further entrenching the political divide over what should be a universal concern.

Misinformation and disinformation are significant barriers to the collective action we desperately need. Tactics like claiming green energy is too expensive or unreliable, or framing climate action as part of broader cultural conflicts, are designed to plant doubt and hinder progress. Social media's algorithms, which favor emotive content and posts from friends, only amplify these falsehoods. Research from Indiana University shows that such content is more likely to [gain traction](#), making it harder to combat with factual, science-based information. Other challenges include greenwashing, the constant barrage of negative news, and the rise of eco-anxiety — a chronic fear of environmental doom. These issues highlight the importance of responsible content creation and consumption in the climate space.

We have a tremendous opportunity to use social media as a force for good. By leveraging our platforms to share accurate, inspiring content that drives climate activism, we can boost collective action, all while staying grounded in the facts and stories of the climate crisis. This means properly crediting sources, linking to science-backed research, and building trust with our audiences through transparency and integrity. Simple [fact-checking sites](#), easy-to-digest tips on [how to fight climate misinformation](#), or a quick reverse image Google search are helpful tools to credit your information.

Is all activism effective?



I'm half Honduran and Utila, Honduras, is where I first learned how to dive and truly discover the magic of the underwater world when I was 16 years old. Coming back to this island 11 years later, I was stunned to find many beaches completely covered in trash. On my holiday, I did four cleanups there to help protect this precious island and biodiversity.

There is no straightforward answer as to what types of activism are most effective, but here's my perspective based on what I've observed and learned within the online climate community: Activism comes in many forms, from radical to peaceful, and each approach has its strengths and challenges.

Radical activism often involves dramatic actions like blocking highways, chaining oneself to trees, or even throwing paint or soup on the glass casings shielding famous artworks. These activists aim to draw attention to the climate crisis by making headlines and sparking conversation — something that, unfortunately, the voices of scientists alone often struggle to achieve. This strategy uses a radical approach to a radical problem, and may open dialogue with climate deniers. While some view these actions as divisive or counterproductive, the

reality is that they succeed in putting climate issues in the spotlight, even if the coverage isn't always favorable. "Bad press" is still press, and in a world where the climate emergency isn't getting the attention it deserves, radical actions can be a necessary wake-up call.

On the other hand, peaceful activism focuses on education, supporting ongoing initiatives, and using passion and empathy to inspire change. This approach is more likely to resonate with existing supporters of climate action and tends to perform well within these communities. However, it may struggle to reach climate deniers, especially given the way social media algorithms work. Despite these limitations, the role of peaceful activism nurtures a positive, action-oriented movement, especially among young people, and helps instill the hope necessary to confront the climate emergency. By cultivating informed, compassionate dialogue, peaceful activism can lay the foundation for sustainable, long-term change.

Ultimately, there's no right or wrong way to express your activism. What matters is finding the approach that feels authentic to you and resonates with your audience. Whether you choose a radical or peaceful path, or a mix of both, the most important thing is to use your voice and be part of the conversation. Every bit of activism contributes to the larger movement, and we need as many voices as possible to push for the changes our planet so desperately needs.

The importance of collaboration in climate content creation

Collaboration is key — not just among content creators, but across generations, with researchers, scientists, youth, nonprofits, governments, and journalists. While content creators have the skills to make complex information accessible and engaging, our impact is amplified when we join forces with others. Building multi-stakeholder communities is essential for tackling the climate crisis, as it allows us to combine our strengths and reach broader audiences.

For me, being part of the online content creator community has also been instrumental in managing my eco-anxiety. Collaborating and learning from a diverse mix of ocean, climate and sustainability activists (such as members of the [EcoTok Collective](#) and the Pique Action & Harvard Chan C-Change 2024 [Climate Creators to Watch List](#)), and staying informed with educational storytelling organizations (including [Earth Rise Studio](#) and [Atmos](#)) and accounts with a focus on supporting environmental and social justice ([Environmental Intersectionalist](#), [Re-Earth Initiative](#), and [Black in Marine Science](#)) in this space keeps me motivated and inspired with solutions I might never have encountered on my own. Following accounts that share hopeful news and innovative ideas (including [Only One](#), [Alaina Wood](#), [Jacob Simon](#), [Sam Bentley](#), and my [Positive Ocean News Series!](#)) fills my feed with optimism and reminds me that, despite the challenges, there are many people working toward a better future for our planet.

I encourage you to think about how you can contribute to this collaborative effort. Whether you're creating content, supporting campaigns, or simply sharing information, every action counts. Together, we can build a more informed, engaged, and empowered community, united in our commitment to protect the ocean and combat climate change.

Stepping into the digital landscape: How to get involved



I spoke at the 2024 UN Ocean Decade Conference representing EarthEcho International as a Youth Leadership Council alum. I gave the closing remark to the event "The Ocean Decade and the new BBNJ Agreement: Opportunities to support Ratification and Implementation," which was the main topic for my master's thesis prior, and provided insights on youth perspectives and needs in the ocean-climate nexus to the table.

If you're passionate about climate activism and want to make a difference in the digital space, now is the perfect time to get started! Whether you're a scientist, journalist, activist, or someone who simply cares deeply about the environment, there are many ways to contribute and make your voice heard online.

While focusing on a single niche might make it easier to build a large audience, you don't need to confine yourself to just one area. Embracing multiple passions can actually help you connect with a more diverse and engaged audience. Whether you're blending ocean conservation with climate justice or explaining sustainable fashion through plant-based recipes, integrating your various interests can lead to more creative and compelling content. This passion-driven approach expands your reach, offering fresh perspectives and making your platform more dynamic, relatable, and genuinely engaging for your followers.

As you explore different topics, it's essential to stay informed. Continuously educate yourself by reading scientific articles, following credible news sources, creators, and organizations, and engaging with experts across various fields. The more knowledge you have, the more effectively you can communicate and advocate for the issues that matter to you. When creating content, focus on authenticity and creativity. Use your unique perspective to craft messages that resonate with others, whether through videos, articles, social media posts, or podcasts.

Building a community online is about more than just sharing information — it's about building genuine connections with trust. Be mindful of misinformation by ensuring your content is accurate and backed by credible sources. Always fact-check before posting, and maintain transparency with your audience to build credibility in your advocacy.

Amplifying other voices is also crucial in the climate movement. The effort is collective, and supporting diverse perspectives, especially from underrepresented communities, is vital. Share content from other creators, support grassroots initiatives, and use your platform to highlight the broad range of voices within the climate conversation. You should also take the time to engage with your audience by responding to comments, participating in discussions, and collaborating with other creators. This work helps you build a network of like-minded individuals who are equally passionate about driving change.

Finally, stay persistent and positive! The journey of digital activism can be challenging, but persistence is essential. Keep creating and sharing, even when it feels like your efforts aren't gaining traction (trust me, we've all been there!). Just like mother nature, resilience will help you overcome setbacks and continue to inspire waves of change.

10. Transforming stories: The new generation of climate journalism

Antonio Díaz Aranda



Antonio Díaz Aranda, who has an engineering degree from the University of Monterrey in Mexico, participated as a climate activist and content creator in the 2024 UNESCO Youth Multimedia Room. Seen here, he speaks as a panelist for the plenary session “Facing a future for all” during World Press Freedom Day in 2024 in Santiago, Chile. Photo courtesy of Antonio Díaz Aranda.

What happens when you bring together journalists, activists, and young content creators in one space? This was the premise behind the **Youth Multimedia Room (YMR)** during UNESCO’s 2024 World Press Freedom Day Conference. In Santiago, Chile, 27 young people from around the world came together in the YMR, where technical knowledge of journalism and fact-checking intertwined with the creative skills of young people. The goal was clear: to work together to build robust youth-led climate journalism aligned with the conference theme, “A Press for the Planet.”

The YMR was more than just a gathering; it was a convergence of diverse perspectives and talents aimed at reshaping climate journalism. Through this unique collaboration, the critical role of young people in driving climate narratives was explored, alongside the necessity of embracing innovative approaches like storytelling to foster deeper connections with audiences, and the imperative to adapt climate journalism to the digital age.

Redefining climate journalism: a space for all voices

For a long time, climate journalism was seen as the exclusive domain of professional journalists. However, the landscape is shifting as a new generation of activists and content creators redefines how climate journalism is practiced and perceived.

Climate journalists continue to provide in-depth technical analyses and report on the far-reaching effects of climate change. Their work remains crucial, offering detailed and specialized content that underpins the scientific understanding of our climate crisis. Maria Ressa, a renowned investigative journalist from the Philippines and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, has passionately dedicated her life to the pursuit of truth in journalism. She once powerfully said:

“If you don’t have facts, you can’t have truth. Without truth, you can’t have trust. Without these three, you have no shared reality, you can’t solve any problem, let alone climate change. You cannot have democracy.”

– Maria Ressa in DW

Meanwhile, activists have harnessed the power of social media to express their dissatisfaction with existing systems and amplify the social movements they champion. Through their voices and platforms, they draw attention to urgent issues and mobilize communities for change. Content creators, on the other hand, engage audiences with accessible and compelling narratives, focusing on individual actions and practical steps that people can take to contribute to climate solutions.

Each of these roles plays a crucial part in climate journalism, broadening the reach of information and offering diverse content tailored to varying preferences and levels of technical understanding. Today’s climate journalism thrives on this interdisciplinary approach, collaboration, and creativity, fostering innovative ways to discuss the climate crisis that not only inform, but actively involve audiences in meaningful conversations.

The YMR highlighted a fundamental lesson: the goal should not be uniformity but rather embracing diversity in climate journalism. Encouraging diverse voices and formats enriches the discourse and engages more people in the conversation. The sector must shift its mindset to recognize that there is no single “best” way to address the climate crisis. Instead, we should focus on democratizing journalism knowledge by providing access to training and tools, ensuring that all contributors are equipped to deliver accurate and impactful information.

Climate journalism in the age of social media

The way we approach the climate crisis is evolving, and digitalization is transforming the mediums through which we address it. Traditionally, climate journalism was confined to newspapers and specialized media. However, the rise of social media platforms has revolutionized journalism, democratizing access to information and empowering youth voices to shape the climate change narrative.

Today, climate journalism manifests in various forms, from **short, engaging videos** designed to capture attention to **culturally relevant memes** that make the content more accessible and entertaining. Social media has fundamentally changed how we communicate about the climate crisis, making it easier for diverse voices to be heard and for information to spread rapidly.

Yet, this transformation brings its own set of challenges. Social media platforms have become breeding grounds for misinformation and disinformation, with false narratives spreading faster than ever. This prevalence of misleading information, coupled with the intense social pressure from these platforms, poses significant obstacles for climate journalists and content creators. They face threats to their reputation, social image, and, in extreme cases, their well-being. UNESCO's "**Press and Planet in Danger**" report and studies such as "**Cyber-echoes of the climate Crisis: Unraveling anthropogenic climate change narratives on social media**" offer valuable insights into the various impacts and consequences of this growing trend.

In response, the YMR played a crucial role in equipping young participants with the necessary tools and resources for accurate reporting. Through specialized training provided



Antonio Díaz Aranda notes the way content creators, activists, and others used their own devices to report on World Press Freedom Day. Photo by Antonio Díaz Aranda.

by journalism professionals, multimedia experts, and fact-checkers, young people gained hands-on experience in identifying misinformation, employing fact-checking techniques, and incorporating direct feedback to enhance the reliability of their content.

The impact of social media on climate journalism is undeniable, and disengagement is not an option. As social media's reach continues to expand, climate journalism must adapt and reinvent itself to combat both the climate crisis and the misinformation and disinformation crisis in social media.

Beyond the numbers: How storytelling is shaping the future of climate journalism

Storytelling, the art of crafting compelling narratives, is a cornerstone of journalism that bridges the gap between the rational and the emotional. Its significance lies in its ability to transform complex facts and figures into engaging stories that resonate with audiences on a deeper level. In the realm of climate journalism, storytelling becomes a powerful tool for cultivating empathy and humanizing the often-abstract data associated with climate change. In an era where climate change is frequently reduced to mere statistics — temperature increases, greenhouse gas emissions, and environmental impacts — storytelling offers a vital counterbalance. While scientific analyses provide essential insights into the scale and complexities of the climate crisis, they often fall short of capturing the human experience behind the numbers. Storytelling addresses this gap by bringing to life the dreams, fears, and struggles of those affected by climate change, making the crisis more relatable and urgent.

During the YMR, participants were immersed in sessions where experts, activists, and journalists shared data as well as **poignant personal stories from the field**. Some sessions were profoundly moving, as participants heard the harrowing tales of defenders who **have faced persecution, unjust treatment, and public repression while striving to protect our planet**. These stories underscored a crucial truth: storytelling has the power to unite and inspire.

The YMR also sparked a critical reflection on the role of youth in the international climate discourse. Historically, young people have been marginalized, seen as passive observers rather than active contributors. Today, however, youth are not only engaging in the climate conversation but are actively reshaping and driving it. The YMR was pivotal in this transformation, providing a platform for young voices to be heard and valued.

Through this experience, the members of the YMR learned not only about the general importance of storytelling in climate journalism but also about the unique value of their individual stories. This initiative empowered them to recognize that their personal experiences and perspectives are not only relevant but vital to the broader climate dialogue. Each story has the potential to inspire change, challenge prevailing narratives, and advance the global conversation on climate action. By embracing the power of their voices, young people contribute to a more inclusive and diverse climate narrative that resonates with a wider audience and reflects the pressing reality of the climate crisis.

The road ahead for the YMR

The long-lasting impact of the YMR is profound. By building the capacity, knowledge, and abilities of young journalists, activists, and content creators, we are nurturing a new generation of climate advocates who are equipped to report on the biggest crisis of our time. The skills developed in this space are not confined to a single event but are a foundation for broader engagement and future impact. The YMR is not just about informing; it's about inspiring and enabling the next generation to take charge.

It is imperative to extend the YMR format to other major climate events, such as the Local Conference of Youth (LCOY), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP). By enabling youth to report directly on these platforms, we amplify their voices and integrate innovative viewpoints into critical climate discussions.

Through climate journalism we are writing not only our own future, but most importantly, the one of the generations to come and the planet we all call home.

"We are living in complicated times, but the most important story we have — the story of our planet — is not yet over."

– Antonio Díaz Aranda

11. The rights of Indigenous peoples and the fight against the climate crisis amid misinformation and climate denialism

Paulo Galvão



Paulo Galvão, who studies international relations at a university in São Paulo, Brazil, participated as a climate activist in the 2024 UNESCO Youth Multimedia Room.

The origin of violence and anti-Indigenous policies in Brazil: The role of communication in confronting violence, misinformation and combating the climate crisis

Indigenous peoples in Brazil have suffered rights violations for more than 500 years, since the arrival of colonizers who initiated processes of violence against them. Currently, the rights violations against Indigenous peoples are many and varied: invasion of territory,

deforestation, illegal mining, land grabbing, the expansion of agribusiness, and ethnocide of populations and cultures.

But nowadays we have an essential tool for reporting and combating these crimes: communication. In recent years, the strengthening of Indigenous organizations' direct communication from the territory has been essential to stop and report environmental crimes that affect our lands. Although we live in an era of great misinformation and fake news, social media and media outlets are ways for us to show what really happens within Indigenous territories. They are also a space for us to talk about our struggles and challenges and, above all, to achieve the necessary visibility that our stories demand. In this way, social media and media outlets play an important role in strengthening and disseminating true news and accurate information.

Anti-Indigenous projects are advancing in Brazil alongside fake news and misinformation about climate change. An example of this is the **Marco Temporal thesis**, a legal argument that puts a time limit on Indigenous peoples' right to their traditional lands and that paves the way for anti-Indigenous policies related to agribusiness, land deforestation, mining, and land grabbing. These actions reinforce the violence and genocide suffered by Indigenous peoples in Brazil and contribute to the climate crisis, since these territories are what guarantee the climatic and environmental equilibrium of Brazil and the world.

According to reports from the **Indigenous Missionary Council**, violence against Brazil's 305 Indigenous populations in resistance has increased systematically, showing an increase in 16 of the 19 categories of aggression.

During this same time, the climate crisis has intensified and brought increasingly greater and more unequal consequences for populations. And those who suffer most are the most vulnerable and contribute least to this crisis.

In 2023, Cuiabá, the capital of Mato Grosso, the state that is home to the **Xingu Indigenous Park**, which has 16 ethnic groups (Aweti, Ikpeng, Kaiabi, Kalapalo, Kamaiurá, Kisêdjê, Kuikuro, Matipu, Mehinako, Nahukuá, Naruvotu, Wauja, Tapayuna, Trumai, Yudja, and Yawalapiti), was the hottest capital in Brazil, reaching 44.2°C (about 111.5°F). According to a study by the **National Institute of Meteorology**, the data show that since the 1940s, the temperature has risen by 3°C in the state. It was also the year in which we had several natural disasters, which I prefer to call announced tragedies, because what we are experiencing now is not natural: it is the result of years of destruction and exploitation of nature by humans and the colonial system.

The climate crisis in the lives of the most vulnerable

The climate crisis has intensified in every corner of the world. **European Observatory**. According to the World Meteorological Organization's "**State of the Global Climate 2023**" report, never before has the world experienced a situation with so many extremes and records: in Earth's greenhouse gas levels, in our planet's surface temperatures, in acidification and heat of the oceans, in sea levels, and in ice cover in Antarctica and the Arctic.

The consequences of the climate crisis reached my region, the Amazon, where I was born, raised, and live to this day. I'm from the Baixo Tapajós region, which is located in the west of Pará, where the Tapajós River meets the Amazon. It is here in this region, with rivers and lakes like the Rio Arapiuns and Lago Grande, where several Indigenous and riverside communities live and depend solely on the river to survive. There are 14 Indigenous ethnic groups in this region: Arapiun, Apiaká, Arara, Borari, Jaraki, KaraPreta, Kumaruara, Maytapu, Munduruku, Tapajó, Tapuia, Tupayú, Tupinambá, and Sateré Mawé, who live in about 106 villages spread across the Tapajós and Arapiuns rivers and Lago Grande.

In 2023, the drought in the region was one of the worst in history. I saw my territory taken over by mud, by the silting of streams and lakes, by the death of animals, by hunger and despair. Additionally, there was the difficulty of getting around and accessing many communities, as the main means of transport in the region is by boat. If the river dries up, there is no way to get around. Here's a [video produced](#) by independent reporters from the region, with accounts from people affected by the drought. Unfortunately, in September 2024, the month in which I am writing this text, we are already experiencing a drought that is even more severe than the previous year.

This is just one of the real examples of the consequences of the climate crisis. You don't have to look far to read and hear other desperate reports of the 2023 extreme drought in the Amazon and, in 2024, it will be no different.

The majority of populations who are affected by the consequences of the climate crisis suffer from environmental racism, which in Brazil touches peoples' color, race, gender, social class, and geographic location. They are the most vulnerable populations who suffer all the consequences of a problem that they did not create. They are the same populations who fight every day to survive and those who fight the most to reverse this entire situation. They fight for social and climate justice, and to find a responsible and ambitious response to climate change.

The answer lies with the people of the forest

The relationship and connection of Indigenous and traditional peoples with the land is ancient. They have always listened and will continue to listen to Mother Earth. With the greed of the white man and the advancement of the colonial and capitalist system, humanity lost its connection to nature, causing many today to treat nature as separate from human beings. However, we are nature and nature is us. The people of the forest never lost this connection, which is why to this day we hear the voices and guidance of the spirits and enchanted ones, or rather, of nature, Mother Earth, who guides us and gives us wisdom to continue in the midst of so much chaos and destruction of life.

Traditional ways of life and wisdom prove every day that the answer lies in us, Indigenous peoples. We are the true guardians of life. It doesn't take much to understand this, just look at our territories, full of beauty, biodiversity, life, and riches of nature, culture and

identity. However, these territories have been destroyed by non-Indigenous people, as the consequences of the climate crisis are reaching these territories and destroying everything, including lives, as I already mentioned above.

Indigenous territories, in addition to stories, wisdom, and cultures, store biodiversity and knowledge that have not yet been discovered by science, but which are often practiced by Indigenous peoples and which can be part of the solution to all these crises that we have experienced in recent times.

What the world needs is to listen to the knowledge and call of Indigenous and traditional peoples and reconnect with nature, so that we can be one again, and end the relationship of exploitation and destruction of life through greed and profit. The fact is, the world has a lot to learn from the ways of life and wisdom of Indigenous peoples, and we can use this reconnection to build a better today and tomorrow.

The fight for climate justice and against climate denialism

The struggle of Indigenous peoples is constant, it does not stop. And today, this fight is to guarantee our rights, but it is also for everyone's lives.

I, Paulo, am a 21-year-old man who believes that the revolution is and needs to be collective, and that only in this way will it be possible to build a today and tomorrow in which it will be possible to live. We often say that we Indigenous people were born in the struggle. That's how I started fighting and taking action at a young age. At the age of 15, I joined a youth-led organization, **Engajamundo**, where I still am today. It was then that I realized that change needs to be collective and starts locally. We have to change ourselves to change our surroundings.

Today, after six years of experience at Engajamundo, during which time I have been able to participate in many things, including two United Nations climate conferences, COP 27 and 28, I realize that changes need to be systemic and that these changes need to, above all, prioritize the most vulnerable. After all, we are the ones most affected by the unequal consequences of the climate crisis.

The fight for climate justice is the fight to repair all the harm caused by the exploitation and ambition of capitalism. This harm costs lives and erases histories when environmental "disasters" happen, like the one that occurred in Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil in May 2024.

Even in the midst of so much evidence, misinformation and climate denialism are increasing more and more. People choose to believe anything other than science, evidence, and real accounts of the climate crisis. Therefore, we activists and communicators have a crucial role in the fight against the climate crisis and misinformation. The mission is to overcome misinformation and denialism and make more and more people systematically recognize the causes, effects, consequences, and actors of climate change.

I, for example, use my social media to talk about the climate crisis, bringing information and content that engages with the topic in an intersectional way. The climate crisis is something

that is linked to all aspects of our lives, so it is necessary that communication also makes people see themselves in these problems and, above all, see themselves as part of the solution to these problems.

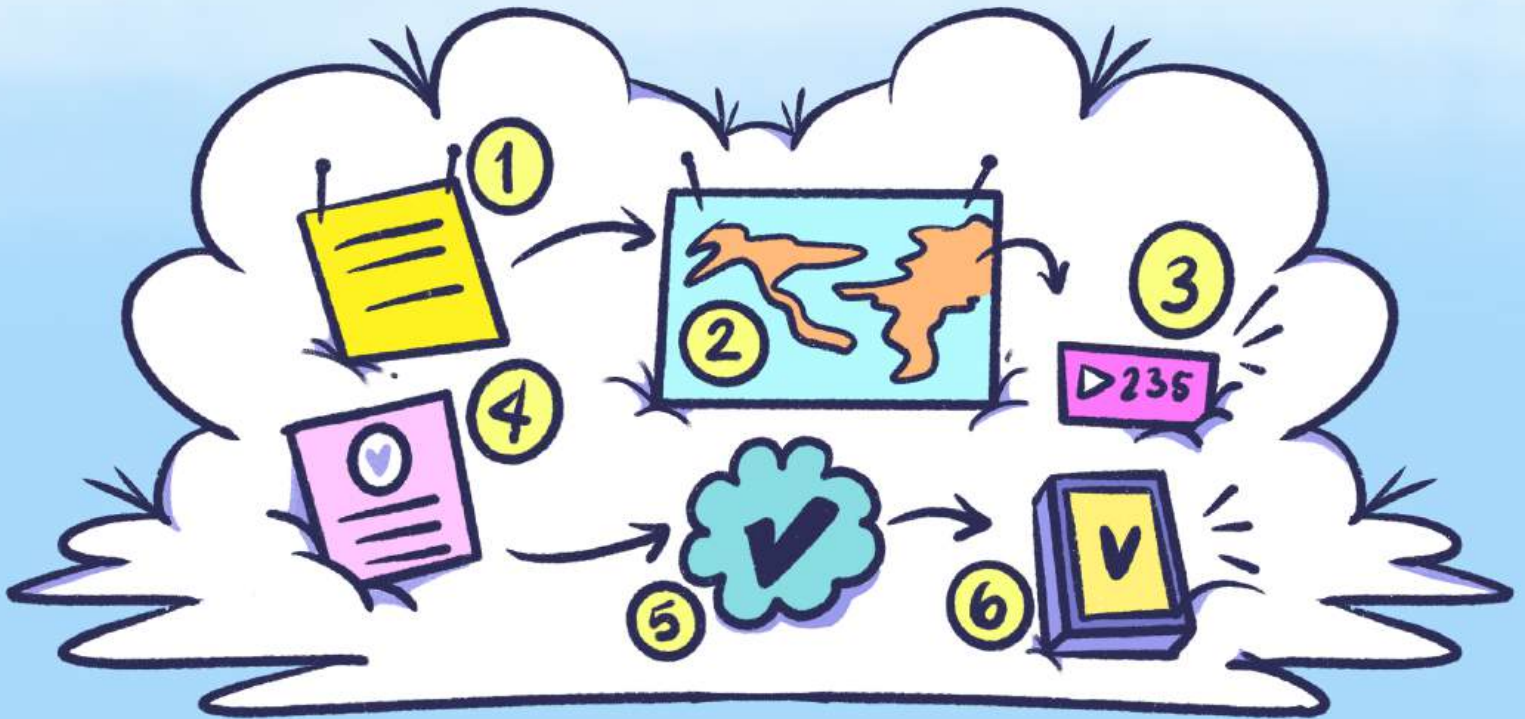
We still have a problem with the mainstream media, which is their difficulty in reporting and publishing information about the climate crisis in a broad way. Generally, what we see in the traditional media is news and technical information or specific events related to climate change. However, we need to simplify, democratize, and popularize the discussion about climate change. This work has been done by groups of influencers and content creators who talk about climate change in a simpler way, while still valuing the quality of the content and not leaving any information out, but understanding that many people do not understand or do not have access to technical information. As I said above, we need to make these people see themselves in the problem. So, this group plays a crucial role in making the content more accessible and interesting for all audiences.

The scenario we face today is truly worrying. In the midst of so much misinformation and the advancement of climate denialism, we need more than ever to think about and execute strategies to overcome misinformation and ensure that true and real news reaches people, especially those most affected by the climate crisis who have not yet associated the various problems they experience with consequences of climate change.

We also need to ensure, more than ever, that the rights of Indigenous peoples are guaranteed. After all, if there is no territory, there is no solution to the climate crisis. It is also necessary for the media to implement effective strategies to ensure that true messages, based on science and experiences, are passed on and understood by people. In the midst of misinformation, we need to guarantee freedom and accuracy in news about the climate crisis.

Now I ask, what does a 21 year old mean by all of this? It's simple. The message is explicit and unique: We are the answers; there is no future without reconnection with Mother Earth. Here I continue fighting in defense of life and for climate justice, because as Indigenous leaders say, the fight for Mother Earth is the mother of all fights. Before I finish, I would like to say to those of you who are reading this text in different parts of the world: strengthen small and independent communication channels, in addition to the content created by activists and communicators. Follow the pages, support, research, check, and share the information with more people. You can start right here: my [social media](#) is open to everyone, and there you will find other serious accounts committed to the truth and change.

Part 4: Digital Content Creators as Catalysts for Media and Information Literacy



12. How can digital content creators combat mis/disinformation and foster media and information literacy?

Media and Information Literacy Unit, UNESCO

In today's digital age, the proliferation of information has made it easier than ever to access a wealth of knowledge at our fingertips. This abundance of information also comes with the challenge of distinguishing between accurate information and false or misleading information that can have serious consequences, from public health risks to undermining democratic processes.

As influential news providers, digital content creators play a key role in providing information to their audience. Therefore, it is crucial they are empowered with the necessary skills and competencies to not only debunk and counter mis/disinformation but also transmit their knowledge to their online communities.

This chapter explores practical strategies and best practices digital content creators can adopt to combat mis- and disinformation and promote media and information literacy.

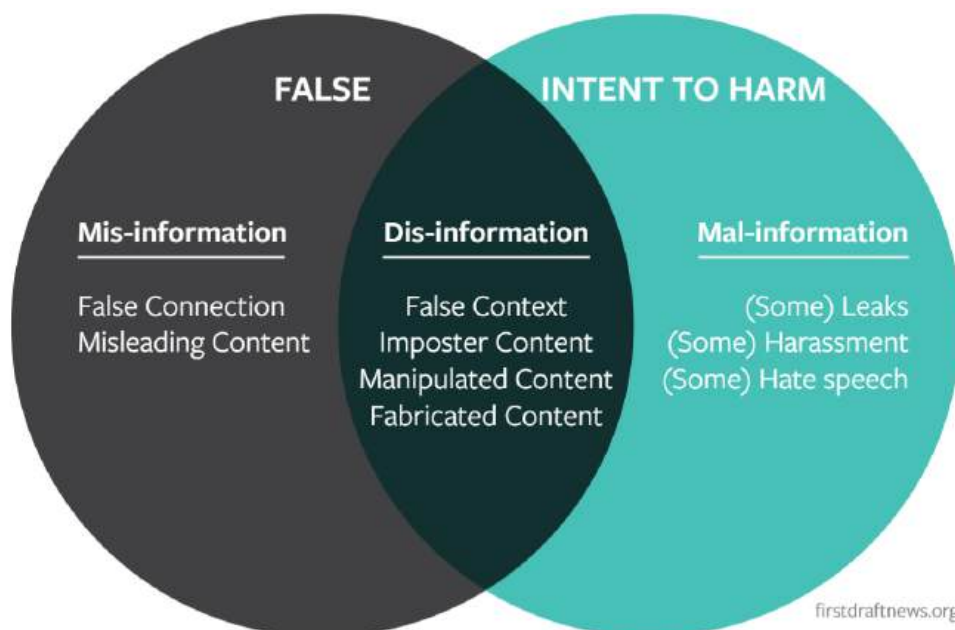


Figure illustrates information disorder and the differences between mis-, dis-, and mal-information.

Understanding mis/dis/mal-information

Before diving into strategies to counter mis/disinformation, it is essential to understand what these concepts mean.

Misinformation refers to false or inaccurate information that is spread without the intent to deceive. It often occurs when people share incorrect information believing it to be true.

Examples:

- ➔ Sharing a news article with outdated information
- ➔ Posting a health tip that is based on a myth or misconception
- ➔ Spreading rumors without checking the accuracy of the claims

Disinformation is deliberately misleading or biased information spread with the intent to deceive or manipulate. It is often used to influence public opinion, and create confusion, mistrust, and polarization.

Examples:

- ➔ Creating and sharing fake news stories to sway political opinions
- ➔ Spreading false information about a competitor to damage their reputation
- ➔ Using doctored images or videos to misrepresent events or facts.

Mal-information refers to information that is based on reality, but used to inflict harm on a person, an organization, or a country.

Example:

- ➔ Doxing, when someone's private information (like their home address or phone number) is shared publicly to harass or intimidate them.

As digital content creators, it is essential to be aware of these differences to ensure the accuracy and integrity of your content. By understanding and identifying mis/disinformation, you can take steps to prevent their spread and provide reliable content to your audience.

Strategies to address the spread of mis/disinformation

Digital content creators play a key role in informing their audience. Because of their reach, they must be vigilant and thorough in their content production. Below are some key strategies to combat mis/disinformation.

Verify information before sharing it

One of the most effective ways to combat mis/disinformation is to ensure the accuracy of the information before it is shared. Always verify facts and look for consistency in the information provided from multiple sources before publishing content. Use fact-checking techniques and tools to cross-check information and avoid spreading falsehoods. If needed, partner with fact-checkers who can provide valuable insights and resources to help you verify information and debunk false claims. For images and videos, use reverse-image search tools to check the origin and authenticity of the visual content. This can help identify if the content has been altered or taken out of context.

Be transparent and cite reliable sources

Transparency is key to building trust with your audience. Be open about your sources, methods, and any potential biases in your content. If you make a mistake, acknowledge it and correct it promptly--this demonstrates integrity and fosters a culture of accountability. Whenever possible, refer to primary sources such as official reports, academic studies, and direct statements from credible organizations or experts. This not only adds credibility to your work, but also helps your audience identify trustworthy information. Avoid using sources with a known bias or with a history of spreading mis/disinformation.

Avoid sensationalism

Be cautious of sensational or extraordinary claims that lack evidence. Sensationalism can attract attention, but it often leads to the spread of misinformation. Focus on providing accurate and balanced information rather than sensationalizing stories for clicks and views. Strive for quality over quantity in your content.

Reflect diverse perspectives and consult experts

Encourage a diversity of perspectives in your content to provide a well-rounded view of issues. This helps combat filter bubbles and echo chambers. Highlight voices from different backgrounds and viewpoints to foster a more inclusive and informed discourse.

Use technology wisely

Leverage technology to combat mis/disinformation. Utilize tools and platforms that help identify and flag false information. Stay informed about the latest developments in AI and machine learning that can aid in detecting and preventing the spread of misinformation.

Educate your audience

Share with your audience your skills, knowledge, and tools to verify information. This not only helps them avoid being misled, but enables them to educate others.

Promote media and information literacy

Digital content creators have a unique position to empower their audience to better understand and engage with media content. By leveraging their platforms, they can share knowledge and skills that help their audience critically evaluate and navigate information. By raising awareness on the importance of media and information literacy, they can not only help combat mis/disinformation but also contribute to a safer internet for all.

Lead by example

Demonstrate good practices by fact-checking information before sharing, being transparent about sources, and promoting respectful online behavior. To do so, educate yourself on media and information literacy: take the free online course [“Digital Content Creators and Journalists: How To Be a Trusted Voice Online.”](#) which will start in November 2024. Registration will open at the end of October 2024.

Engage in constructive dialogue

Foster a community where respectful and constructive discussions are encouraged. This can help followers feel more comfortable engaging with differing viewpoints. Use interactive methods like Q&A sessions, polls, and quizzes to engage your audience and make learning more dynamic.

Create educational content

Create and share content that explains the basics of media and information literacy, such as how to verify sources, recognize bias, and understand the impact of media. We know you are bursting with creativity, but here are some ideas of educational content: tutorials, how-to guides, infographics, explainer videos, quizzes, webinars... Share case studies and real-life examples to illustrate the practical applications of media literacy skills.

Collaborative projects

Work with educators, journalists, fact-checkers, scientists, and other professionals to produce joint content that reaches a wider audience and combines different perspectives and expertise. Collaborations often spark new ideas and creative approaches to promoting media and information literacy.

Share resources

Provide followers with links to reliable resources, articles, and tools that can help your audience improve their media and information literacy skills.

Selection of UNESCO resources:

- ➔ [Podcast “Think Critically, Click Wisely”](#)
- ➔ [Online course on media and information literacy and climate change](#)
- ➔ [Video on decoding Generative Artificial Intelligence](#)
- ➔ [Video on the significance of media and information literacy in times of elections](#)

By taking on this educational role, digital content creators can make a significant impact in the fight against mis/disinformation, ultimately contributing to a more informed and resilient society.

13. International framework of freedom of expression: What content creators should know

Media and Information Literacy Unit, UNESCO

Since time immemorial, human beings have used different forms of expression to convey ideas, comprehend the world around them, and engage in dialogue. These forms of expression range from simple body language to prehistoric cave paintings, from oral traditions of ancient philosophy and religious scriptures to the printing press, from scientific innovation to artistic movement, and from print journalism to digital and social media posts. A fundamental human right that underpins the enjoyment of this wide range of freedoms is the right to freedom of expression.

Today, an individual connected to the internet has the power to express their thoughts, stories, culture, and artistic expression in a wide range of formats – through blogs, vlogs, podcasts, memes, and social media posts, to name a few.

Influencers and digital content creators are at the forefront of this new wave of communication, which is made possible not just because of evolving digital technologies, but because of the fundamental human right to freedom of expression.

Understanding the legal framework, scope, and characteristics of the right to freedom of expression will enable content creators and journalists to know their rights in digital spaces while fostering an enabling environment for users. It will further enhance content creators' engagement with their audiences, allowing them to respond to essential information needs, and provide content that advances the exercise of the collective right to freedom of expression online.

Freedom of expression as a legally guaranteed right

The right to freedom of expression was first enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which sets forth the fundamental rights that must be universally protected. In Article 19, the UDHR states:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers¹.

Under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the right to freedom of expression is further guaranteed in Article 19, along similar terms as the UDHR. This implies that the 114 countries² that have ratified the ICCPR are legally obligated to protect and fulfill the right to freedom of expression.

There are three main characteristics of the right to freedom of expression³:

- ➔ freedom to hold opinions,
- ➔ freedom to receive information and ideas, and
- ➔ freedom to impart information and ideas.

Further, this right is applicable universally or “regardless of frontiers” or borders, and through any media of one’s choice – including via the Internet.

International standards thus constitute a promise to users of digital platforms that they can rely on fundamental rights to protect their expression, shielded from political and economic interests.

Freedom of expression is not only a fundamental and inalienable right in itself, but it also enables the enjoyment of other human rights, including the rights to education, health, a clean environment, and to vote and participate in public affairs.

Freedom of expression as a qualified right

While freedom of expression is a fundamental norm protected by international law, it is not an absolute right.

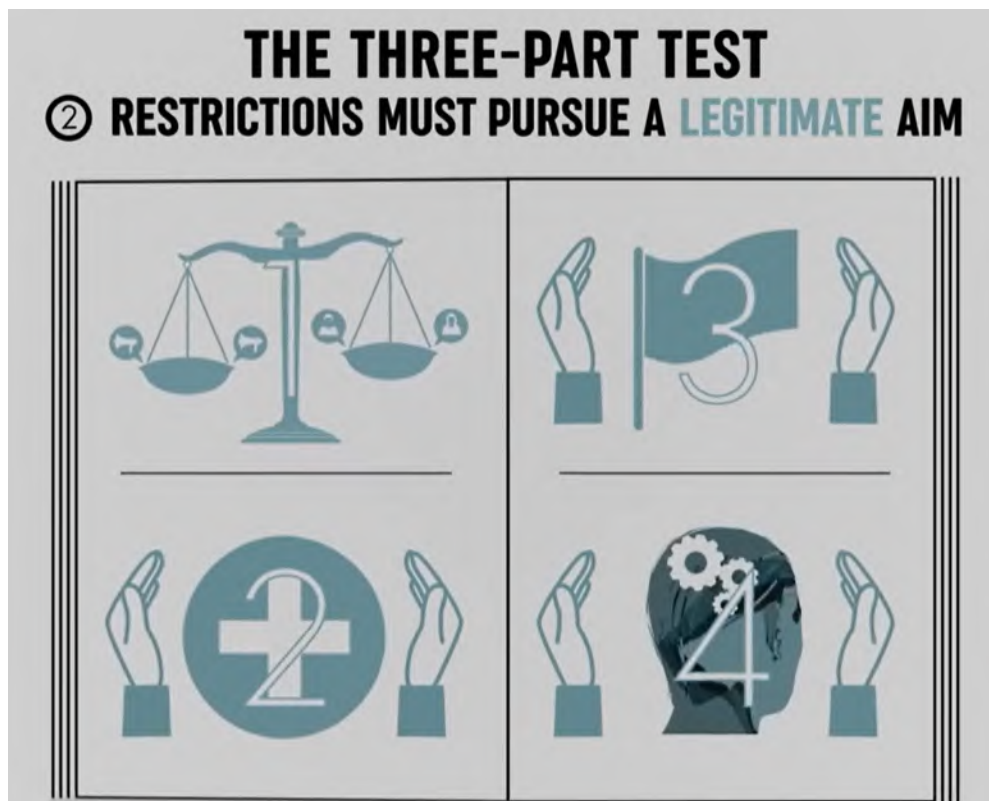
The ICCPR, in Article 19, paragraph 3, permits narrowly defined and exceptional restrictions to the right to freedom of expression, which must:

- I. be provided by law, which is clear and accessible to everyone;
- II. pursue one of the legitimate purposes set out in article 19, paragraph 3, of the Covenant (protection of national security; public order; public safety; public health; public morals; or protecting the rights of others); and
- III. be proven as necessary and the least restrictive means required to achieve the purported aim.

In order for a State to restrict free expression, a “three-part test,” or the cumulative conditions of legality, necessity, and legitimacy, must be met.

Some forms of expression have been commonly restricted by regional and national courts around the world, including defamation (to protect the rights and reputation of others against attacks)⁴, slander, libel⁵, hate speech (to protect the rights of affected individuals/communities)⁶ and incitement to violence or terror (to protect the rights of others, such as the right to life).

Restrictions on individuals’ ability to express themselves online can manifest in various ways, such as through technical mechanisms, like blocking or filtering access to specific content. Additionally, a lack of adequate safeguards for privacy and personal data can discourage the exchange of opinions and information.



This figure illustrates part 2 of the “three-part test” (credits belong to UNESCO). It is a screengrab from [UNESCO’s video](#).

Taking the example of copyright laws, UNESCO highlights that copyright serves to promote creativity by providing creators with control over their works and the ability to receive recognition and financial rewards. At the same time, broad copyright enforcement might restrict the free flow of information, especially when content is locked behind copyright protections that limit access or usage.

In such instances, international law emphasizes the importance of striking a balance and ensuring that individuals do not misuse their freedoms to infringe upon the rights of others. Taking this a step further, States have positive obligations to protect human rights against unjustified interferences by private actors, including digital platforms.

However, two forms of speech should be prohibited by law, as set out in Article 20 of the ICCPR. These include: (1) any propaganda for war; and (2) any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence.

It is important for content creators to note that the authoritative global standard for ensuring freedom of expression, including on digital platforms, is human rights law and not the varying laws of States or private interests⁷. Global media companies and digital platforms have adopted policies and community standards to address hateful and violent speech. These policies, in some cases, include references to the ICCPR (Article 19 and 20) and international human rights law and bodies such as the Human Rights Committee.

Freedom of expression as a guiding framework for content creators & journalists

So, how can content creators and journalists use their right to freedom of expression?

Journalists and media professionals have a special role to play in providing access to essential information of public interest. As per international standards, those performing the broad-based function of journalism may be defined as journalists.

The Human Rights Committee, in its General Comment No. 34, sets out a definition of journalism as being “a function shared by a wide range of actors, including professional full-time reporters and analysts, as well as bloggers and others who engage in forms of self-publication in print, on the internet or elsewhere.”⁸

The function of journalism thus serves to protect and promote the collective right to freedom of expression. This definition extends to influencers and digital content creators. By producing information and sharing it on social media platforms to meet the needs of online users, content creators play a critical role in shaping public discourse. This in turn, has an impact on everyone’s freedom of expression, and enables access to information that is credible, professional, and in the public interest.

While journalists do not have a privileged right to freedom of expression, special protections are afforded to them as their professions put them at particular risk of violence while reporting on issues such as corruption, human rights violations, environmental issues, organized crime, public crises, or emergencies. Along the same lines, content creators – when producing information that may face criticism or skepticism – also can be exposed to threats, abuse, and censorship. This further affects their safety, reputation and audience engagement.

It is thus critical that content creators:

1. Raise awareness regarding the legal framework around freedom of expression, including considerations around intellectual property and copyright laws.
2. Pay particular attention to platform policies and community guidelines, and examine their compliance with existing human rights standards concerning digital content.
3. Through self-regulatory approaches, ensure the production of content that is reliable, accurate, and verified, which fosters greater access to public-interest information.
4. Reinforce the principles of transparency and accountability in the production of content and its dissemination across digital platforms to prevent the spread of harmful content and mis/disinformation.
5. Uphold professionalism and respect for diversity in their interactions with online audiences to build trust and foster positive engagement.

Freedom of expression provides a guiding compass for content creators in the digital age. In an online environment charged with AI-generated misinformation and disinformation, violent extremism, biases and discrimination, and violation of digital privacy, content creators are in a critical position to serve as trusted and credible sources of information.

By upholding the fundamental freedoms of expression and access to information, and following the principles of transparency and accountability, content creators and influencers can use their voices to foster user empowerment on digital platforms.

1 United Nations. (1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

2 Status of ratification by State Parties as of September 2024. United Nations. (1966). International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/MTDSG/Volume%20I/Chapter%20IV/IV-4.en.pdf>

3 Council of Europe. (2017). Freedom of expression: A handbook for the implementation of Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. <https://rm.coe.int/handbook-freedom-of-expression-eng/1680732814>

4 “Defamation can be broadly understood as the communication of a false statement that unjustly causes harm to a legal or natural person’s reputation”. See Media Defence. (2020). Fact sheet: Defending the media in defamation cases (p. 1). <https://www.mediadefence.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Media-Defence-Defamation-Fact-Sheet-for-Web.pdf>

5 “The term ‘libel’ is also used when referring to defamation in written or another permanent form, such as via radio, TV, or other forms of communication including online, while “slander” alludes to its oral and unrecorded form.” See UNESCO. (2021). The “misuse” of the judicial system to attack freedom of expression. World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development (p. 2). <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000383832/PDF/383832eng.pdf.multi>

6 According to the United Nations, “hate speech refers to offensive discourse targeting a group or an individual based on inherent characteristics (such as race, religion or gender) and that may threaten social peace”. See <https://www.un.org/en/hate-speech/understanding-hate-speech/what-is-hate-speech>.

7 United Nations Human Rights Council. (2018). Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression (A/HRC/38/35, p. 20). <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g18/096/72/pdf/g1809672.pdf?OpenElement>

8 UN Human Rights Committee. (2011). General Comment 34, CCPR/C/GC/34. <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/docs/gc34.pdf>

14. Redes Cordiais: Empowering influencers, transforming networks

Clara Becker, Guilherme Amado, and Gabriela Almeida

Redes Cordiais is a Brazil-based nonprofit working to build healthier, safer, and more trustworthy spaces online.

In a scenario where social networks have become the main stage for public debate, Brazil's Redes Cordiais (Cordial Networks) realized back in 2018, the year it was founded, that digital influencers were key actors in helping face the new challenges imposed by excess information and the growing toxicity of the digital age. As active voices who have high credibility with their audiences, influencers, or digital content creators, enjoy a great reach and a unique ability to communicate different topics to very different audiences in an agile way – something particularly valuable in a country with continental dimensions like Brazil. But it is essential that the digital presence of these creators is responsible, allowing them to become strategic allies in the fight against misinformation and hate speech.

With the aim of improving the participation of digital content creators in the public debate — whether YouTubers with millions of followers to Instagrammers, Tiktokers, and even influencers on LinkedIn with smaller audiences — Redes Cordiais developed a **workshop** on topics related to media education, training influencers to combat the spread of toxic content on social media and promote healthier debates. Combining journalism, non-violent communication and other areas of knowledge, in these training sessions we offer tools so that influencers can critically analyze information, verify sources, identify hate speech and polarizing terms, and understand the risks of misinformation for our physical, mental, and social health. Furthermore, we emphasize the importance of empathy and ethical communication to promote more constructive conversations and reduce conflicts online.

The ultimate goal is clear: to ensure that social networks become a healthier digital environment and a safe and constructive space where democracy prevails. Twenty-one workshops were held **during the last six years**, training 335 influencers, who together are followed by around 140 million people (if we consider only the main social network of each workshop participant, without excluding possible overlaps).

Thematic training and workshops

Our aim is for these influencers to become better examples for their followers and to help spread media education within their own networks, sharing content that they learn from us. Social networks have redefined the public sphere, surpassing television as the main source of information in Brazil, according to the Reuters Digital News Report. Digital influencers and celebrities are replacing journalists as news sources for young people, especially on TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat. At the same time that new communicators emerge, professional

journalism is losing ground. The 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer reveals that trust in the media has fallen in 16 of the 27 countries surveyed, including Brazil, where only 46% of the population trusts the press.

This new scenario requires identifying and training new voices in the communication ecosystem, who often aren't prepared or don't have the ethical training to play the role of communicators, to reach audiences that traditional journalists can no longer reach. Influencers move trends and audiences, an ambivalent power that can amplify important news but also spread misinformation.

For example, during the pandemic, a Reuters survey showed that influencers were responsible for 20% of lies about the coronavirus, but these posts generated 70% of engagement on the subject on social media. Training these new actors is crucial to ensuring accurate, quality content in this new open communication space.

In addition to media education workshops, at Redes Cordiais we offer in-depth literacy courses on a broad range of critical topics that deserve special attention on social media, like polarization, integrity of the electoral system in Brazil, or non-binary identities, among others. These courses provide an in-depth understanding of the topics covered and enable influencers to deal with these issues in an informed and responsible way.

Diversity is key to what we do. We seek to train influencers across various bubbles, platforms and follower-sizes, from soap opera actresses to favela activists, from Indigenous people from the Amazon to socialites from the richest neighborhoods of São Paulo, from funk stars to right and left politicians, from trans activists to evangelical pastors. This way we not only guarantee plurality in our discussions, but we avoid a large overlap of followers in our effort to avoid bubbles.

In workshops with influencers, we maintain diversity in the selection of participants, and delve into the specificities of different age groups and themes. We learned that customizing content was an interesting way to ensure that each group of influencers could better recognize the risks to which they are exposed and how to mitigate them.

Among the thematic workshops we organize are those aimed at influencers and activists who address environmental issues, helping them to communicate accurately and responsibly in a field that often suffers from misinformation and attacks. In partnership with the [Instituto Sou da Paz](#), we brought together a group of influencers to help us improve the quality of the debate around public security. For influencers whose main audience is children and teenagers, we highlight the double responsibility they have, as they are dealing with people in the process of forming personality and critical thinking, without the full capacity to deal with media consumption in a healthy way. We also created a specific workshop for influencers over 60, who represent a group especially vulnerable to online scams and misinformation.

To date, all participants in our workshops have reposted our content during training. After the sessions, 83.3% of influencers reported feeling more empowered to identify fake news, and, a year later, around 30% had already incorporated content verification techniques into

their routines. Furthermore, 75% said they deal better with hate attacks, avoiding escalations of violence, and 70% began to reflect more on their role on social networks, adopting a more responsible stance. An important fact is that 76.6% shared media education lessons with their followers, and 96.1% recommended our training to other influencers. We have cases of influencers who unblocked themselves on Twitter after meeting in our workshop.

Many influencers started asking us to verify information in our WhatsApp groups before they published it. In some cases, we observed that they carried out the fact-checking themselves before receiving our response, with some even becoming true fact-checkers. Furthermore, we offer continuous support in situations of online attacks, with effective protocols for dealing with trolls.

Campaigns

After participating in at least one training activity, influencers are invited to join the Redes Cordiais community, where they receive ongoing support and participate in an active collaboration network around building a healthier digital environment. Everyone is brought together in WhatsApp groups, through which they are invited to engage in events and campaigns that promote the fight against misinformation, as well as healthy dialogues and mental health care when using social media. We also offer support in verifying information, creating content aligned with our mission, and helping cope with attacks by haters.

Through the “More Dialogue on Networks” campaign, Redes Cordiais set out to try to stop the growth of discourse that promotes electoral disinformation and online violence, especially among young people aged 16 to 24. For this, influencers were invited to record videos on key topics for media education. They included singer and former Big Brother Brazil participant **Manu Gavassi**; actress Camila Pitanga, star of highly successful soap operas; and journalist Zeca Camargo, former presenter of Sunday’s most watched news program Combined, the videos garnered more than 500,000 views.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Redes Cordiais and Agência Lupa, the main fact-checking agency in Brazil, formed a network in which digital influencers trained in our workshops shared Lupa’s checks on the main rumors identified in daily monitoring, in addition to tips on how not to believe false content about the pandemic. Among the participants was **Thelma Assis**, a doctor who became an influencer after winning the reality show Big Brother Brazil in 2020.

Since then, Redes Cordiais and Lupa have carried out several other partnerships in campaigns involving our community of influencers. In the 2022 presidential election, we ran the “Breathe Before You Believe” campaign, where we applied inoculation theory. It suggests that prior exposure to weak counter-arguments or refutation of misinformation can strengthen people against accepting false information in the future. Instead of focusing solely on debunking, we took it a step further by detailing the strategies behind each false narrative.

Additionally, we customized content for each influencer based on their style. For **comedian**

Fábio Porchat, one of the most successful stand-ups in Brazil, we created a script with a comedic feel, and for psychologist and former child soap opera star Cecília Dassi, we focused on the psychology of misinformation.

Within the mission of expanding the repertoire of influencers and their followers on how to have healthier conversations on social media and reduce hostility, our community is also engaged in campaigns with this theme. We had them record videos on how to avoid heated arguments during family Christmas dinner, based on scripts written by us, as well as campaigns that propose practical exercises to promote the generous and transformative act of active listening.

We have also run campaigns aimed at mental health, as we believe there is a relationship between the psychological state of social media users and the type of content they post. We believe that social media influences each person's mental health, so we encourage conversations on the topic, such as the campaign we ran during the pandemic that featured actress Paolla Oliveira, who has 37 million followers on Instagram alone.

On the International Day for Countering Hate Speech, June 18, we mobilized our influencers to give visibility to historically marginalized populations, such as Indigenous peoples, who are often targets of hate speech.

Live streaming

Taking advantage of the popularity of live streams during the pandemic, we organized debates with influencers on hate speech, misinformation, and related topics. Various personalities participated, such as the singer Anitta, famous throughout Latin America; philosopher and activist Djamila Ribeiro, known for her defense of the rights of Black women in Brazil; journalist Mariliz Pereira Jorge, columnist for Folha de S.Paulo, the largest newspaper in the country; and federal congressman Felipe Rigoni, a pioneer in the legislative debate on digital regulation and misinformation.

One of the most successful live streams was with singer and songwriter Anitta, who, with her 64.5 million followers on Instagram, attracted 1.6 million viewers for a conversation lasting more than an hour about misinformation and its effects on public debate and in health. Betting on the live format and the power of influencers, we organized other broadcasts, addressing different perspectives on disinformation. In partnership with Agência Lupa, we promoted a marathon of live streams, with the presence of influencers such as the philosopher and activist Djamila Ribeiro and actor Rodrigo França, who debated the intersection between misinformation and structural racism; pediatrician Daniel Becker, who spoke about the impacts of misinformation on health; and journalist Patrícia Campos Mello, who discussed the role of the press in combating fake news.

Other topics covered in the live streams included "Misinformation bubbles in the digital environment," "How to deal with image crises created by fake news," and "The use of misinformation to fuel structural racism." These events, which also featured experts like

Fabio Malini, Ana Paula Pontes, and Mônica Nunes, proved to be a valuable tool for using influencers to promote media education and combat misinformation, reaching a vast and diverse audience during the pandemic. The central objective of these live streams was to train and engage influencers and their audiences, using their platforms to promote healthier and more responsible debates.

Immersive (and Instagrammable) experiences

This immersive format, or using visits to physical locations to bring more transparency to the functioning and value of democratic institutions, was something we started in 2022 with a trip to the headquarters of the Superior Electoral Court, the entity in Brasília responsible for organizing elections across the country.

Redes Cordiais took a group of 29 influencers who cover different topics and are of different races, genders, and political affiliations, to spend a day in Brasília at the electoral court. As a form of *prebunking*, experts explained to the influencers not only how the entire electoral process works, but also the measures that guarantee its integrity, especially the security of electronic voting machines — the object of attacks by then-President Jair Bolsonaro, who was trying to undermine the credibility of the system. From that day until the date of the elections, participating influencers published 600 pieces of content on the topic, bringing accurate information to their millions of followers and debunking misinformation. With this, we set up a network followed by more than 10 million internet users, ready to disrupt the spread of electoral disinformation.

In 2023, we repeated the immersive format with the “Influencers for Journalism” project. We took a diverse group of influencers to three national and important media outlets: newspapers *O Globo* and *O Estado de S. Paulo* and the site *Metrópoles*. On each visit, the group of influencers received information from journalists, news managers, and editors about journalistic techniques, ethical issues, changes as a result of the growth of the internet, and other topics related to the universe of information production, with an invitation to share the information with their followers through the production of content in real time or posts after the visits. At the meetings, influencers, and consequently their followers, were invited to reflect on the importance of journalism for democracy and the responsibility that comes with sharing news. For journalists, contact with influencers was also beneficial, especially considering the challenges that journalism faces in gaining new audiences and overcoming news avoidance.

In 2024, in a new immersive experience, the “Laws and Likes” meeting brought together ministers of the Supreme Federal Court (STF) and influencers in an enriching exchange of experiences on the impact of digital influence on the judiciary. The event, aimed at making the internet a more sincere environment for everyone, was held in partnership with Redes Cordiais, the STF itself and *Instituto VERO*, an NGO founded by the biggest Brazilian YouTuber, Felipe Neto. Twenty-five influencers with different profiles participated and produced more than 400 pieces of content. Additionally, there were discussions about misinformation,

healthy dialogue, and the importance of communicating rights, with a largely positive reaction in the press and on social media.

The project also created an unprecedented civic space in the STF, in which ministers heard directly from voices in society concerning opinions about the court's actions.

Publications

Redes Cordiais, in partnership with important institutions, has produced five essential guides to help influencers maintain a responsible digital presence. The “Guide for influencers in elections,” in collaboration with InternetLab, addresses topics such as freedom of expression, transparency, responsibility, and pluralism in the electoral context. The guide “Talking about online attacks and trolls,” also developed with InternetLab, teaches how to deal with digital



Redes Cordiais influencers visiting the Supreme Court in July 2024.

violence. Also with Internetlab, we created the “Booklet for confronting gender and racial political violence,” aimed at trying to reduce two of the main types of hate speech in political contexts. “The true digital influencer,” written for Redes Cordiais by educommunicator Januária Cristina Alves, offers specific guidance for creators of children's content. Finally, the “Responsible guide in emergency situations — Rains in Rio Grande do Sul,” in partnership with YouTube, offered guidance on disseminating reliable information in times of crisis.

Lessons learned

For anyone thinking about working with content creators or influencers in the field of media literacy, here are some guidelines:

- ➔ **Values alignment.** Ensure the influencer is aligned with the cause you represent. This not only ensures a genuine partnership and more impactful content, but also highlights the importance of media literacy for both the influencer's work and the education of their audience.
- ➔ **Clarity.** Clearly define the goals of the collaboration and communicate them concisely to the influencer. Specify the type of content desired (video, post, stories, etc.), the target audience, and the main message.
- ➔ **Ready-made content.** Be prepared to also provide ready-made content if the influencer prefers or has time constraints. This demonstrates professionalism and helps advance collaboration even in the face of unforeseen circumstances.
- ➔ **Co-creations.** Be open to co-creations, but ready to deliver full content if it's more efficient. Co-creating requires more work, proximity and exchange to guarantee a quality result. It's crucial that the influencer has the freedom to tailor the message to their audience, but collaboration with the specialist is essential to ensure the content is accurate.
- ➔ **Personalization.** Show the influencer that you value the partnership and personalize your communication. Show how collaboration can benefit both the cause and the influencer themselves.
- ➔ **Appropriate deadlines.** Provide generous deadlines, but be prepared for possible delays or dropouts. Pro-bono work may not be prioritized, so it's important to keep this in mind in your schedule.
- ➔ **Frequent follow-ups.** Stay in regular contact, as influencers juggle a lot of demands. Frequent follow-ups help prevent important tasks from being postponed or forgotten.
- ➔ **Support in case of attacks.** Influencers who don't tend to address certain topics, especially political ones, may face criticism when they do. Be prepared to offer support in these moments.
- ➔ **Relationship.** Cultivate a long-term bond with the influencer. Stay in touch, follow their work, and look for opportunities for future collaborations. Supporting other demands and being kind in interactions will strengthen the relationship.



Part 5: So You Want to Be a Content Creator? Tips and Best Practices



15. So You Want To Be a Digital Content Creator?

Tips and Best Practices

Summer Harlow

Digital content creation has become an increasingly important part of the news media landscape. While there are noteworthy ways it differs from traditional journalism, content creators can learn valuable lessons from journalistic practices to enhance their work, and journalists can benefit from better understanding what creators do. Of course, there's no secret formula for success or a magic wand to wave to make you know how to use social media to its fullest potential. But for any aspiring or emerging creators out there or seasoned creators looking to bring more journalistic integrity to their content, or journalists looking to incorporate the creativity and engagement creators are known for, here are some key tips and best practices to keep in mind:

Understand your role and responsibilities

As a digital content creator, it's important to recognize your influence and the responsibilities that come with it. While you may not consider yourself a traditional journalist, and you have more flexibility than traditional journalists, you still have an obligation to your audience. As your audience grows, so does your influence and responsibility. To tweak the proverb we often attribute to Spiderman, with great influence comes great responsibility.

Be sure to:

- ➔ Understand what your ethical and legal responsibilities are
- ➔ Set ethical standards for yourself, and stick to them
- ➔ Be clear about your mission and values
- ➔ Consistently create content that fulfills that mission
- ➔ Recognize that successful content creation is a business and an art

Focus on building trust and credibility

Whether you consider yourself a content creator, a journalist, a "newsfluencer," or something else altogether, establishing trust with your audience is crucial for long-term success. Just like a restaurant that serves terrible food will eventually lose customers and fail, if you constantly get the news wrong, audiences won't keep coming back to your content. You have to treat producing content like a business: be consistent and treat your audiences like customers.

To build credibility:

- ➔ Fact-check rigorously
- ➔ Cite sources transparently and use reputable sources
- ➔ Acknowledge and correct mistakes quickly
- ➔ Amplify verified information
- ➔ Be consistent in your reporting and ethics
- ➔ Be transparent when it comes to ads and sponsorships
- ➔ Don't be afraid to show your personality or share your perspective, but be clear when you're stating opinions versus facts
- ➔ Be authentic and honest

Develop strong storytelling skills

Content creators, like journalists, need to be adept storytellers who can engage audiences.

Focus on:

- ➔ Translating complex issues into simple, accessible language
- ➔ Using visuals, graphics, and other multimedia elements effectively
- ➔ Structuring stories in compelling ways
- ➔ Finding unique angles on topics
- ➔ Learning to verify information and conduct interviews
- ➔ Not underestimating your audience: you don't have to make everything funny or entertaining to make it compelling and relevant, but it should be appealing and easy to understand
- ➔ Creating a curiosity gap
- ➔ Making quality content, but know that being "too" perfect is not interesting

Understand your audience

Successful content creators understand what their audiences need and want. They know their audience because they engage with them and not only request, but take to heart, their input and feedback.

To connect with your audience:

- ➔ Research your target demographic thoroughly

- Engage directly with followers through comments/social media
- Track metrics to see what content resonates
- Know when your audience is online and more engaged, and schedule your posts accordingly
- Adapt your style and topics based on audience feedback

Understand the different platforms

Not all platforms have the same audiences or affordances, and what works well on one might bomb on another. Plus, platforms come and go (MySpace, anyone?) so your overall strategy must be adaptable.

Use platforms successfully by:

- Learning the best practices for each platform you use to maximize your reach and engagement; one size doesn't fit all
- Adapting your content and presentation style to fit each platform while maintaining your core message and values
- Trying A-B testing to find the types of titles and thumbnails that most appeal to your audience
- Experimenting with how the different algorithms work so you can use them to your advantage; remember you're not just making content for audiences, but you're making it for the algorithms, too
- Using different social media platforms to work together to promote your content
- Plugging into the social media culture, seeing what other creators are doing and having success with

Master video and audio production

While text still has its place, video and audio are increasingly key to reaching audiences that have turned away from traditional news media.

Key skills to develop:

- Scripting/storyboarding with what you will say and how you will present it
- On-camera presence
- Audio-friendly voice and cadence
- Video and audio production and editing
- Optimizing for different platforms (YouTube, TikTok, etc.) and formats (short videos, documentaries, podcasts, etc.)

- ➔ Data visualization
- ➔ Live streaming
- ➔ Social media literacy, knowing that stories built for print, TV, or radio don't automatically translate to social media

Balance journalistic standards with creativity

Some of the most effective content creators blend journalistic rigor with an engaging style.

Strive to:

- ➔ Maintain professional and ethical standards
- ➔ Fact-check before posting or sharing content
- ➔ Present information in accessible, entertaining ways
- ➔ Build direct relationships with your audience
- ➔ Find your unique voice and perspective
- ➔ Be mindful of how to effectively mix entertainment and information, maintaining accuracy and depth

Develop a business model

Oftentimes, content creators and journalists who strike out on their own are focused more on the content they want to produce and the types of stories they want to tell, rather than how they will make a living.

To work toward sustainability:

- ➔ Recognize from the outset that it's hard to make money as a content creator
- ➔ Identify short- and long-term goals and metrics for success
- ➔ Choose a financial model and create a business plan
- ➔ Pursue brand sponsorships/partnerships, and be transparent with your audience about why you're doing so
- ➔ Don't be afraid of ads
- ➔ Know your views and other metrics so you can translate them into ad revenue
- ➔ Experiment with donations and paid memberships and subscriptions
- ➔ Be clear with your audience and sponsors/advertisers about how much influence they will or won't have over your content

Be prepared to handle criticism, misinformation, and online harassment

As a content creator, you'll likely encounter mis- and dis-information, hate speech, and criticism.

Be prepared to manage these professionally by:

- ➔ Developing strategies for fact-checking without amplifying misinformation
- ➔ Having a plan for content moderation, whether manual or automated
- ➔ Adjusting platform settings
- ➔ Knowing when and how to contact social media platforms as well as freedom of expression organizations to ask for help
- ➔ Prioritizing media literacy among your audiences, explaining your processes, sourcing, and the context behind the topics you post about

Stay adaptable

The digital media landscape is constantly evolving, and successful players in this new field must be willing to adapt.

To stay relevant:

- ➔ Keep up with emerging platforms and technologies
- ➔ Be open to experimenting with new formats
- ➔ Lean into trends
- ➔ Listen to your audience as their preferences change
- ➔ Collaborate with others to expand your skill set
- ➔ Know there's always something new around the corner that can change the way you're doing everything right now



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