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REWRITING MEDIA NARRATIVES ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

From content creator to journalist (the importance of research and source checking)

Professional Learning Suite
For Journalists and Communication Professionals

Section: Crosso Sectional Competences

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by: INDEPCIE

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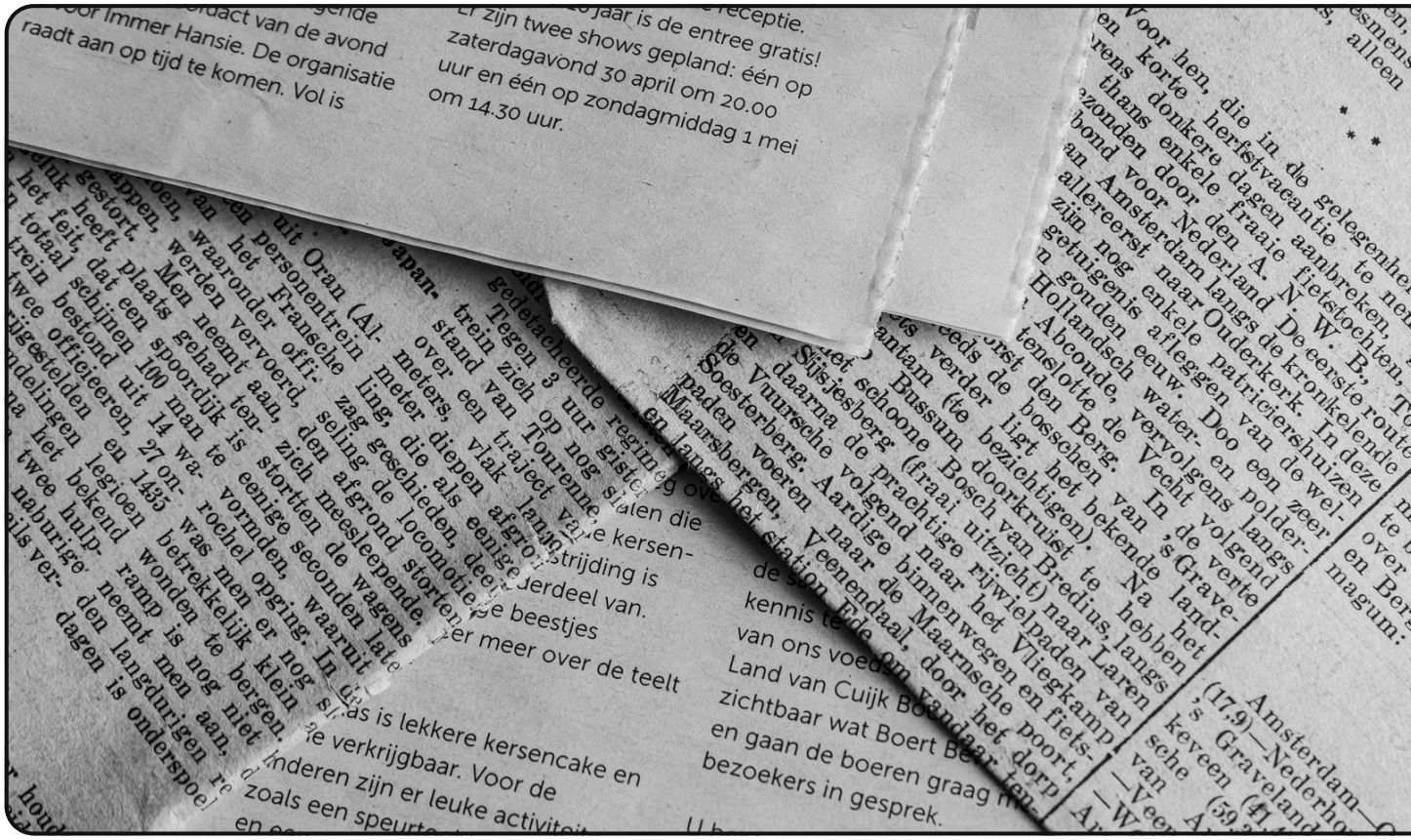

1. Why this subject matter

In the digital age, the distinction between content creators and journalists has become increasingly blurred. Social media platforms allow individuals to publish information instantly, reach large audiences, and influence public conversations without necessarily following the professional practices traditionally associated with journalism. While this has expanded opportunities for participation and expression, it has also highlighted the importance of research, verification, and source evaluation.

Content creators often work in fast-paced digital environments where visibility, engagement, and immediacy are highly valued.

Journalists, by contrast, are expected to verify information, provide context, consult multiple sources, and remain accountable for the accuracy of what they publish. The transition from content creator to journalist therefore requires more than producing content; it requires adopting a disciplined approach to research and source checking.

In the context of gender-based violence (GBV), these skills are particularly important. Information that is incomplete, unverified, or taken out of context can distort public understanding, reinforce misconceptions, or amplify harmful narratives. Responsible reporting requires careful verification, contextualisation, and evidence-based communication.

Research and source-checking skills enable professionals to distinguish reliable information from unsupported claims, assess the credibility of sources, verify facts before publication, and communicate complex issues with accuracy and responsibility. These competences help transform content production into a journalistic practice grounded in evidence, accountability, and public trust.”

2. Learning Outcomes



01

Identify reliable sources and evaluate their credibility.

02

Apply fact-checking and verification techniques to produce accurate and evidence-based content.

03

Transform informal social media content into contextualised, verified, and accountable journalistic material.

3. Definitions

Research and source checking refer to the systematic process of gathering, evaluating, verifying, and contextualising information before publication. These practices help ensure that content is accurate, evidence-based, and supported by credible sources.

While **content creators** often publish information quickly in response to trends, events, or audience engagement, journalists are expected to follow a more rigorous process. This includes verifying claims, consulting multiple sources, assessing credibility, and providing sufficient context for audiences to understand the information being presented.

The transition from content creator to journalist therefore involves adopting a research discipline that prioritises verification, contextualisation, and accountability before publication.



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4. Psychological and Neurolinguistic Mechanisms

The way people produce, share, and evaluate information is influenced by several cognitive mechanisms. Confirmation bias can lead individuals to favour information that supports their existing beliefs, while the availability heuristic encourages reliance on information that is easily accessible rather than thoroughly verified.

Emotional reasoning may cause content creators to interpret claims according to emotional reactions instead of evidence, particularly when dealing with controversial or highly engaging topics. Similarly, the illusory truth effect increases the likelihood that repeated information will be perceived as accurate, even when it has not been independently verified.

Digital environments can reinforce these tendencies. Social media platforms often reward speed, visibility, and engagement, creating pressure to publish quickly. As a result, information may be shared before sufficient verification has taken place. Developing awareness of these mechanisms helps professionals adopt a more disciplined and evidence-based approach to content production.



5.Typical Errors in Journalistic Practice



Many of the mistakes associated with digital content production stem from insufficient research and verification. Common examples include publishing information taken directly from social media without validation, relying on a single source, misinterpreting data or statistics, and repeating claims without identifying their original source.

Another frequent challenge is prioritising speed over accuracy. In fast-moving digital environments, creators may feel pressure to publish immediately rather than take time to verify information and provide context. This can result in incomplete reporting, misleading conclusions, or the amplification of unsupported claims.

The distinction between content creation and journalism often becomes visible in these moments: while content may be produced rapidly, journalism requires verification, contextualisation, and evidence before publication.

6. Impact on Media Narratives on Gender-Based Violence

Research and verification are particularly important when reporting on gender-based violence. Information that is incomplete, inaccurate, or taken out of context can shape public understanding in harmful ways. Unverified claims may reinforce stereotypes, spread misconceptions about victims or perpetrators, and contribute to confusion around complex social issues.

When journalists fail to verify information or provide sufficient context, public trust in media may be weakened. Conversely, well-researched and carefully sourced reporting supports informed discussion, improves credibility, and contributes to a more accurate understanding of gender-based violence.

7. Positive reframing

Responsible journalistic practice is built upon a commitment to verification, accuracy, and accountability. This means consulting multiple sources, distinguishing facts from opinions, providing evidence for claims, and ensuring that information is presented within its proper context.

Research discipline also involves transparency. Journalists should be able to explain where information comes from, how it was verified, and why particular sources were considered reliable.

The transition from content creator to journalist occurs when publication is guided not only by visibility or engagement, but by verification, contextualisation, and accountability. These practices help transform content into trustworthy information that serves the public interest.





8. Case study

“A viral social media post claims that a high-profile gender-based violence case was fabricated. The post contains emotional language, screenshots presented as “evidence,” and thousands of shares within a few hours. Several online creators repeat the claim without checking its origin. A journalist is asked to cover the story and must decide whether the information is credible enough to publish.”

Discussion

- What steps should be taken before reporting on this claim?
- Which sources would be necessary to verify the information?
- What risks arise when content is shared without proper verification?
- How does the journalist's approach differ from the behaviour of the content creators?
- What additional context would be needed before publishing a report?



9. Practical Exercises

01

Fact-Checking a Viral Claim

Objective:
To develop source evaluation, fact-checking, and verification skills when assessing information circulating on digital platforms.

Duration: 45 minutes

Materials:
•Viral social media post, video, or claim
• Verification Worksheet
• Internet access



Instructions (step-by-step):

1. Participants receive a viral social media post related to a current event or a gender-based violence case. The content contains a mixture of factual information, unverified claims, and missing context.

2. Working individually or in pairs, participants identify:
- The main claims presented in the content.
- The original source of the information.
- Any evidence provided to support the claims.

3. Participants verify the information using:
- Official sources.
- Reputable news organisations.
- Fact-checking platforms.
- Cross-referencing with independent sources.

4. Participants record the verification process in a Verification Worksheet, noting:
    - Which sources were consulted.
    - Which claims could be confirmed.
    - Which claims remained uncertain.
    - Which information proved inaccurate or misleading.

5. Based on their findings, participants determine whether the content is reliable, misleading, incomplete, or false.

Expected Output:
A completed Verification Worksheet and a short fact-checking report summarising the results.

Debriefing / Reflection Questions:

- Which verification steps were most useful?
- What made the original content appear credible?
- How difficult was it to identify the original source?
- What additional information was needed before the content could be considered reliable?
- How does the verification process differ from simply sharing information online?

9. Practical Exercises

02
Cross-Checking Challenge

Objective:
To develop the ability to verify information by consulting multiple sources and evaluating their reliability before publication.

Duration: 40 minutes

Materials:
- Verification scenario handout
- Internet access
- Source Evaluation Worksheet

Instructions (step-by-step):
1. Participants receive a short news claim related to a gender-based violence case. The claim is supported by limited information and references a single source.
2. Working individually or in pairs, participants investigate the claim by locating additional sources and comparing the information provided.
3. Participants evaluate each source using the following criteria:

- Source credibility.
- Evidence provided.
- Transparency of authorship.
- Date and relevance of the information.
- Consistency with other sources.

4. Participants complete a Source Evaluation Worksheet and identify:
   - Which information can be independently verified.
   - Which details remain uncertain.
   - Any inconsistencies between sources.
   - Whether the claim is sufficiently supported for publication.

5. Participants discuss their findings and explain how cross-checking influenced their confidence in the information.

Expected Output:
A completed Source Evaluation Worksheet and a short assessment of whether the claim should be published, revised, or rejected.

Debriefing / Reflection Questions:

- Which sources proved most reliable and why?
- Were there any contradictions between sources?
- How did cross-checking change your initial assessment of the claim?
- What risks arise when relying on a single source?
- Why is source verification a key distinction between content creation and journalism?

9. Practical Exercises

03
From post to article

Objective:
Transform unverified content into a reliable journalistic piece.

Duration: 50 minutes

Materials:
- Example of social media post

Instructions (step-by-step):
1. Analyze a social media post related to GBV.
2. Identify missing information and unreliable elements.
3. Conduct research to verify facts.
4. Rewrite the content as a short journalistic article with:
    - verified sources
    - neutral tone
    - proper context

Expected Output:
Short verified article.

Debriefing / Reflection Questions:
- What changed between the original post and the article?
- How did verification improve credibility?
- What challenges did you face?

Checklist time!

Before publishing, ask:

- Is the information confirmed by at least two reliable sources?
- Are the sources credible and identifiable?
- Is the content free from emotional manipulation or bias?
- Are facts clearly distinguished from opinions?
- Is the context complete and accurate?
- Have I verified images, videos, and data?
- Would I trust this information if I were the audience?

Resources

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Authors

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Contact Us

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medusa.erasmusproject@gmail.com

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