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## Journalism

### The Crisis of Media Distrust



*Fake content can go viral very quickly, and journalists lack trusted tools to verify data and information as they struggle with shorter deadlines in AI age.*

In 2026, the traditional pillars of journalism are facing an unprecedented storm. Where "evidence" was once the industry's North Star, we are now entering a "terrifying era" defined by a lack of trusted tools and the rapid rise of synthetic reality. As the lines between professional journalism and social media influencing blur, the burden of truth no longer rests solely on the reporter—it rests on all of us.

### The Death of the "North Star": From Evidence to Uncertainty

Historically, the hallmark of journalism was the verification of facts through physical evidence: a photograph, a voice recording, or a firsthand video. Today, that foundation is crumbling. Even seasoned journalists find themselves spending the first hours of their day debunking misleading clips before they can even begin to report. We have moved from a world of "trusted sources" to one where even fact-checking units are interrogated with a heavy dose of skepticism.

### **The New Vocabulary of Deception**

Twenty years ago, media critics primarily focused on propaganda—political or commercial messaging designed to sway opinion. Today, the landscape is far more complex, requiring us to distinguish between three distinct threats:

- Misinformation: False information shared without harmful intent.
- Disinformation: False information created and shared to deliberately cause harm.
- Malinformation: Truthful information used out of context to inflict damage.

These elements combine to create a synthetic reality, where deepfakes of public officials and financial icons are used to manipulate elections and defraud investors.

### **The "Liars' Dividend" and the Deepfake Threat**

Artificial Intelligence has introduced what journalists call the "Liars' Dividend." Because deepfakes—highly realistic AI-generated videos and audio—are now so prevalent, it becomes easier for bad actors to claim that real evidence is fake, and for audiences to believe that fake evidence is real.

From celebrity death hoaxes to manipulated videos used during elections to sway public sentiment, the speed at which this content goes viral (often in under two minutes) makes it nearly impossible to contain once the damage is done.

### **The Collapse of the Gatekeepers**

The digital revolution has dismantled the traditional "Gatekeeping Theory" of news. In the past, information passed through a funnel of editors and fact-checkers who acted as filters.

Then: Large newsrooms with multiple layers of verification.

Now: Every influencer is a "journalist." A single creator can act as reporter, editor, and publisher simultaneously, often prioritizing maximum views and speed over accuracy.

### **The Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Toolkit**

To survive this era, both journalists and citizens must return to the basics of Media and Information Literacy. We must move beyond asking "what is fake news?" and start understanding "how is a media message created?"

When consuming any piece of content, we must ask these essential questions:

Who is the source? Can the creator be identified and held accountable?

What is the purpose? Is this information produced to inform, to sell, or to provoke?

Can it be independently confirmed? Does the evidence exist outside of a single social media post?

What is the context? Is a 3-second clip being used to represent a much larger, different story?

### **Conclusion: A Collective Responsibility**

The era of passively consuming news is over. Whether it is a family WhatsApp group or a major news broadcast, the responsibility to question and verify rests on the individual. If we understand who creates information, why they create it, and what its purpose is, we can begin to rebuild the public trust that is essential for a functioning democracy.