Own Your News from Facebook to Blockchain:
A practical antidote to fake news

How to zero in on real news personally curated by you - and ignore the rest.

Intro

In 2018 the world has realised that ´fake news´ is pervasive in online news consumption. The realisation of this problem is acute since the last US elections in November 2016 and continues to gain attention globally. As a result, news consumers no longer trust what they read online. Personal finance columnist Michelle Singletary highlighted in a recent Washington Post piece the different forms of fake news that pervade the internet and the cost that they represent to news consumers. She names the main culprits to be native advertising, click bait and "listicles" - that is, articles that are merely a hollow list and often unresearched, like "seven ways to feel good". These do cost money and time without actually providing quality news content. But some people may still find them entertaining - the author of this is definitely guilty of consuming listicle articles like "ten ways to be more productive" - and they are only the tip of the iceberg.

The core troubling issue is the diffusion of news that is not only fake but also has the potential to impact public political opinion, and ultimately elections. The New York Times and other credible sources, in the wake of the 2016 US elections, have reported on fake news sites being run out of Canada and even Georgia in Central Asia and Macedonia in Europe. They ran the fake stories like clickbait, to make money, because they knew people would click on stories about the

upcoming US election candidates. These sites published completely fake articles about the US presidential candidate Donald Trump that literally went viral on social media, reaching up to millions of consumers. These are only a few examples, there are surely many more fake news sites out there that have not yet been flagged or didn't make it into a New York Times report. But even these few examples illustrate that fake news has become a truly global phenomenon, seeping through several continents with the ability to impact public opinion - and arguably election results - in a leading nation like the US.

Clearly, news content is still a lucrative commodity, otherwise people wouldn't bother publishing fake news to make money. But the business models are topsy turvy - with shallow, misleading or right-out false content raking up cash in some places, for example click bait from a Macedonian website - while trustworthy reporting teams at media companies like the New York Times churn out solid, quality content and are struggling to secure sustainable financial models for themselves.

That said, the news that the media industry is in crisis is old news, and the fake news hype is only making it worse. This book attempts to put forth a solution for channeling news consumers to quality content, preferably using blockchain along the way, and making sure that stellar content is reasonably paid for. And this solution has the benefit of being actionable by both consumers of news and producers of news.

1) How news moulds productivity, growth and Innovation

- News and your own productivity

New content shapes your life possibly more than you would imagine. News has seeped into our daily life in recent years, much more than before because most of us spend so much time connected to the internet. It used to be that to get news you had to park yourself in front of the radio or TV at the right time of day - think Roosevelt´s Fireside Chats. Or you had to go out to buy a newspaper or two, severely restricting the diversity of news sources you had access to compared to the plethora of websites out on the internet nowadays - one billion. Even if it was

delivered to your door, you were likely to read that newspaper at a punctual time of day, like before work or after work, unless you remembered to take the newspaper around with you all day and pull it out at every opportunity. With internet-connected smartphones and news popping up in the form of native advertising and click bait on many websites that don´t even have news as their main focus, news has become pervasive. News is now part of the ubiquitous weave of our lives, not just an add-on.

This is arguably a positive change for the world, and many are quick to point out that increasing access to information is resulting in higher levels of literacy, democracy and social equality worldwide. With the internet, young people anywhere can more easily stay informed about the world and in doing so get access to unprecedented opportunities. This is all true, for certain segments of the world population that are still thirsty for information and education. And for the segments of the world´s people who are highly educated and already have sufficient access to the information they need, this surge of information commonly known as 'information overload´ can have negative effects.

For one, the way that many of us access news, by clicking through websites, does not give us control of what content we are consuming. We are often surfing, rather than deliberately selecting to read an update on a specific topic from a specific news source. This means that we are bombarded with information that can be entertaining, pleasantly surprising, or that can kill our mood and/or productivity. In 2012, a study by Michelle Gielan and Arianna Huffington showed that three minutes of negative news in the morning can lead to a 27% higher likelihood of you having a bad day, as reported 6-8 hours later. With three minutes of positive news, people were 88% likely to have a positive day. Simple as that - the same that sharing coffee with a negative-minded colleague every morning might bring you down more than sharing coffee with a perky, optimistic colleague. There is plethora of studies on this subject and the concept is a pretty simple one.

Second, that same negative news impacts not only happiness, but also productivity levels, according to a similar mechanism. As Gielan states on her website, "a positive brain fuels performance, specifically by decreasing stress by 23%, improving creative problem solving by

20%, and increasing productive energy by 31%" - this concept is the basis of her best-selling book Broadcasting Happiness. A happy mood is correlated with higher productivity.

With documented evidence that consuming negative news in our day may impact our happiness and productivity, there is clearly a case for thinking about how we consume news and trying to gain greater control over our relationship with news consumption, as individuals and as a society. The last section of this book walks through this topic in further detail and provides a simple guide for regaining control of your news consumption.

- **J-Ethinomics: news factored into economic growth**

J-Ethinomics is a term coined by the author of this book and for years was the founding principle of journalism training at the Center for Internet & Media Ethics (CIME). The term unites the ethics and economics thinking in the field of journalism and it was coined with the purpose of pushing practices in journalism that build trust, credibility, and accountability - values that are the foundation of media ethics. In turn, media accountability practices impact media economics and socio-economic development. A few examples:

If news is credible (i.e. sourced and presented as legitimately and accurately as possible by the reporter), it more likely to be viewed by the public as quality news and justify a price tag - think The Economist, a heavily researched and scrutinized publication that can still justify selling for a cost rather than making itself available free.

If news content is produced in an accountable way, it is a reliable source of information for all sorts of activities in the world - from community-based initiatives that copy models from elsewhere that have been reported on (like the organic food box hype that has spread to multiple countries and supports healthier eating habits) to business intelligence about the latest technology trends that are utilized by corporations.

On the other hand if news content is not reliable an outright false, it loses its value in the economic food chain and stops being helpful for development and growth of our society. It

becomes an entertainment commodity like novels and movies, or a political instrument having powerful and twisted effects on the equilibrium of our (still fragile) democratic systems. The entertainment value can be significant but then most would probably agree that for mere entertainment purposes the label ´news´ is not appropriate.

With these concerns in mind, the J-Ethinomics movement advocates greater awareness and emphasis of the general impact that journalism has on economic systems. News reporters don´t tend to collaborate much with economists in academic and policy, and vice versa. But there would be potential for them to - because the impact of journalism on economies, via knowledge flows in industry growth models or via political systems, is giant. Its significance is hugely underestimated and unexplored.

Most economists are familiar with the work of Paul Romer's on economic growth theory (New or Endogenous Growth Theory), which basically states that the continuous development of new ideas is essential for sustaining economic growth. And the role of responsible reporting in creating demand has a lot to do with how the news feeds into economic growth processes, relating to this theory. The point is that knowledge input (that is creativity through innovation and ideas) is a key factor in sustaining growth. In other words, new ideas that are constantly created, for example via Research & Development as well as via other less formal initiatives, are what allow a society to improve its socioeconomic and technological levels.

The global work of the organization CIME in journalist communities worldwide took the work of Romer as model and pushed the reminder that reporters have a crucial role in bringing valuable ideas to the public sphere. This role is fundamental and with much deeper impact than simply making sure individual readers are up to date on what´s going on. That´s a good start - many of us individual news consumers merely want to stay informed to save face at this evening's cocktail event with coworkers, or because we follow the news like any other TV series: it's entertaining. And beyond the individual benefit, there is an even more powerful role for reporting which goes to the root of how our human civilization is continuing to be built. That role is fascinating and actually very real, very tangible. Information is shaping the communities and the world we live in, day by day, and nothing less.

For example, local farmer revenues and entire rural economies can be transformed if the local press reports on new irrigation methods that can be helpful for their crops. In the case of farmers, a small rural community's livelihood in a dry landscape might depend on knowledge of this specific irrigation method. Or think of a science website, and how the timeliness of its news stories may impact investment trends on the market that make or break the viability of a breakthrough technology. And inversely the power of news has the ability to escalate or tamper crises everywhere. In a different setting, like the financial world: remember how the BBC's reporting on the Northern Rock bank's financial troubles in 2007 led to an immediate response by customers, who reacted to the news by withdrawing their cash from the bank's branches the day following the broadcast (in economics this is called self-fulfilling prophecy). The examples are numerous, in all walks of society and across the globe.

In these ways and others, journalism participates actively in this growth model by circulating valuable or potential-full ideas, communicating knowledge all the time and providing the medium for many information flows that are nowadays global. With over one billion websites globally, over two billion daily google searches, over three billion videos viewed daily and more than two million new blog posts written every day, there is no doubt that information flows over the Internet are significantly impacting our communities, societies and overall economic development. And journalists can choose to report on topics that reinforce this instrumental role of the media in economic or social development.

"Growth" has a certain meaning in economics. But Growth can also designate the social processes that build our societies: social progress, shaping community values, educational development, peace-building and conflict-solving - that is anything that involves having and using ideas to make things nicer. News contributes to all these kinds of growth, and many more. In other words, news helps the process of growing as a Civilization, building a Civilization, becoming civilized. As a journalist, you can think about what this means to you, and make sure your reporting contributes to this process. As consumers of news, we can take greater control over which news sources we choose to devote time and resources to consuming. The ´fake news´ hype thus far has involved a lot of shaming and blaming. This book argues that´s not

even helpful. Stamping out fake news entirely is an honorable mission - and maybe not very practical or realistic to achieve in the near future. On the other hand, we can avoid fake news by turning our focus to great news. The last section of this book goes into further detail for how to achieve that magic focus that resets the dials in a positive direction for both individual consumers and the world. It is SMART, to take the terminology from popular management goal-setting tactics: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timely. Flagging the entirety of fake news content on the web? Even using the most up-to-date artificial intelligence technology, not so SMART.

- **How fake news skews elections**

In their 2017 publication, Hunt Allcott at NYU and Matthew Gentzkow at Stanford discuss the impact of "fake news" on elections, based on their research findings. They remind us that "a number of commentators have suggested that Donald Trump would not have been elected president were it not for the influence of fake news". A report from the Stanford Graduate School of Education in 2016 also expresses "worry that democracy is threatened by the ease at which disinformation about civic issues is allowed to spread and flourish."

This sudden lack of trust in the US electoral process since 2016 is a huge threat to democratic processes worldwide. The US has traditionally stood forth as a symbol of ideal democracy, admired and copied by emerging democracies all over the world. That its credibility should flag as a result of fake news - and more generally social media - is puzzling. We have clearly entered a new era in the history of politics and democracy.

Leaders such as Angela Merkel flagged the need to tackle the fake news problem ahead of the 2017 German elections, and it is apparent that the fact-checking solution currently offered by social media giant Facebook is ´very often not relevant´, according to a report on politico.eu. This worries electoral candidates, and voting citizens, who fear that the election results will be skewed because public opinion will have been skewed. In 2018, other governments such as the Macron administration in France are proposing laws in an attempt to avoid the damage to

democracy caused by so much misinformation. The task to adapt legislation to social media and other news-propagating websites is a challenging one, and will take time to get right.

The current era of news is defined by one single new characteristic: the internet. The internet has done wonders for democracy in many ways, for example through the use of Facebook in the Arab Spring in Egypt - and there are many more examples out there. At the same time, the internet has let user-generated content surge - so called "citizen journalism". It has also been an easy channel for other forms of fake news, like clickbait or untrue content that is politically motivated. As Allcott and Gentzkow point out, "an individual user with no track record or reputation can in some cases reach as many readers as Fox News, CNN, or the New York Times". This ability for unknown sources to reach massive audiences is a powerful shift of the status quo.

We need to entirely re-map patterns of information diffusion in the world, how it circulates and the impact that it has on all levels - from individuals to global governance systems. Fake news is costly for individuals and for society by, for example, making it hard for consumers to get a clear picture of who their electoral candidates are, and which one they prefer. As a society we haven't yet figured out a way to prevent this fake information from spreading and causing harm in election processes and in other ways. Hate speech is another form of online information that is potentially devastating. Internet giants like Facebook and Google, regulators like the FCC, artificial intelligence experts and heavily funded organizations like Knight Prototype Fund and Omidyar Network are all working hard to find ways to reign in the surge of fake news. These are all positive steps that we will discuss in the next chapters.

2) What is fake news exactly?

- **Fake news is nothing new**

Politically motivated fake news - or biased news - is called propaganda and is an age old phenomenon. Earliest forms were recorded as far back a the Behistun Inscription around 515 BC. The Arthashastra in ancient India discusses forms of propaganda for politics and warfare.

Propaganda writings such as Livy helped the rise of the Roman Empire. Propaganda news became even easier to propagate during the Reformation after the invention of the printing press in 1400s, and then later during American Revolution to spread ideas around independence.

Financially motivated fake news is not new either - it has often appeared in advertising, with false or misleading statements about products and services that attempt to boost sales. The difference is that this form of information delivery was not called news - it was advertising. Now, a lot of information that is called ´news´ is sponsored by third parties or published with the sole purpose of making money - for example clickbait or native advertising. So content that is misleading for financially motivated reasons is also an old phenomenon.

Now, there has been a surge in blatantly and unabashedly publishing ´news´ which is actually false and motivated only by profit. This is very easy to do with the internet, and is arguably a newer trend.

- **What is fake news now?**

Click bait is any link on a website that is designed to catch the eye and get people to keep reading. Often advertisers pay for this, for example based on the number of clicks.

Native advertising is advertising content that looks like a news story, but it actually meant to promote a service or product. The purpose of the news is advertising in this case, even though that is hard for readers to detect the difference between actual news and native advertising.

False news is outright untrue and can be politically motivated, like the Irish slaves myth that has appeared on Facebook, in Scientific American magazine and on online message boards serve the interests of far-right groups. The myth had been propagated since 1993 with the publication of a book by Michael A. Hoffman II. It later became viral on Facebook starting in 2013.

UGC or **user-generated content** can look like news, and is published by internet users who are usually not professional journalists. In most cases they haven´t checked their sources or don´t know better. UGC comes in the form of blog posts, wikis, videos, or comments on any platform or website.

Bad reporting is content that is supposed to be reliable news, but ends up spreading wrong or distorted information because the journalist author didn't do their job very well. If journalists don't follow reasonable professional standards, they can end up publishing very low quality work This might include relying on data from Wikipedia without fact checking, gathering information from second-hand sources that are not directly connected with the news topic, or focusing on only one side of the story - for example in political stories, including sources from a single political party and ignoring the rest, which inevitably leads to biased reporting.

- **Why panic suddenly now in 2018?**

In a 2017 article, journalist James Carson points out that in pre-Internet days, publishing fake news and managing to monetise from a significant audience was practically impossible. This is because it was difficult logistically to scale distribution of the content, and it took a very long time to attract a large audience to any given publication. Since there were fewer players in the media industry due to these hurdles, laws were far more effective for regulating fake news - essentially it was easier to sue for defamation and other ethics wrongdoings in reporting.

Now, with increasing use of social media, proliferation of content has surged. Fake news has always been around, but has suddenly become an actual problem because so many people are able to post and spread fake or misleading content, especially via social media. It is especially pervasive on social media, where it is difficult to track the source of a news post. Previously, only governments and established media organizations had the means to spread news - via printing, radio, TV - and the propaganda problem was solved once a few trustworthy news organizations emerged like the New York Times, etc. Now millions can publish content and monitoring is a gargantuan - if not impossible - task.

And scores of people have been migrating their news consumption from offline to online to social media, over the past decade or so. The stats just keep moving toward online and then social media. Statista reports that in 2016, 58% of European individuals consumed news online. According to a 2014 report by GlobalWebIndex, 26 of 32 countries studied showed that people are spending more time each day consuming online news rather than traditional forms of media. In the remaining six countries studied, the ratio was close with online consumption trending upwards. Globally, daily averages of online media consumption are steadily increasing. And a 2016 Reuters Institute study at University of Oxford reports that recently:

> ´the biggest change in digital media has been the growth of news accessed via social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. In the United States, to take one example, the percentage of people saying they use social media as a source of news has risen to 46% of our sample – almost doubling since 2013. We see the same trends elsewhere; our weighted EU average also shows 46% using social media for news – even if some countries like the UK (35%) and Germany (31%) have moved less far in this direction. High adoption in countries like Greece, Brazil and Turkey means that usage across all 26 countries averages 51%.´

According to a 2015 study by ZenithOptimedia, global news consumers are expected to spend an average of 506 minutes per day consuming online media in 2017 - up from 490 minutes daily documented in 2015 - but research shows that consumers' ability to assess the credibility of news they get online is as poor as 20%. As I conducted research for this book, I also had to question a lot of commentary that I came across. It has required extra time to double check and locate the original sources for each piece of information, and then assess whether or not they are credible.

Perhaps in relation to this trend, the Reuters Digital Report for 2017 has stated that in the USA, the proportion of people aged 18–24 paying for online news rose from 4% in 2016 to 18% in 2017. This trend in an indication that the market is moving toward a greater concern for quality news and a higher willingness to pay for content.

3) Fixing fake news

Fake news is currently such a trending issue, so that many organizations globally have been tackling the fake news problem in different ways, especially in the past year. Large amounts of funding have become available for anti-fake news initiatives - Knight Prototype Fund and Omidyar Network for example. A majority of efforts focus on flagging or identifying fake news. **There is clearly need for a new model that focuses on directing consumers to verified sources, via direct contact with vetted journalists.**

- **Community-based checking**

Community-based fact-checking involves online users flagging fake news - but which are their sources and why do you trust other users? This is the first approach taken by Facebook or initiatives like Wikitribune. The approach doesn´t lessen the spread of fake news and seems to complicate things by adding an additional layer of user-generated content to verify. Even more so because users are notoriously unable to easily evaluate news accuracy.

In a Stanford study, high school and college students were unable to make the difference between news and advertisement: "Overall, young people's ability to reason about the information on the Internet can be summed up in one word: bleak [...] When it comes to evaluating information that flows through social media channels, they are easily duped." The Stanford Graduate School of Education study of 2016 based on 7,800 responses from middle school, high school and college students, found that only 20% young people questioned the credibility of a given news source, even when it was unusual news - in this case, they were shown a photo of flowers that had supposedly grown deformed as a result of radioactivity from the Fukushima disaster in 2011. Despite the photo being posted by a completely unknown source and the image itself looking very unrealistic, the remaining 80% of students believed it to be probably true.

In the case of Facebook, the platform enables articles to be flagged as "disputed", though it appears this does not predictably lead to a decrease in traffic for that article. Once a news story

is out there on the web, the fact that it has been flagged as untrue by a third party does not make it any less entertaining for consumers. According to an article in Fortune from May 2017, a story falsely claiming that thousands of Irish had been brought to the US as slaves was flagged on Facebook - but "traffic to the story actually increased significantly after Facebook applied the warning."

Facebook's method of marking articles as disputed probably needs a little time before we can assess if it is actually resulting in changing consumer behaviour - that is, are people less or more likely to click on a disputed new item? Either way, this method does not solve the root problem that false or misleading facts are easily spoon-fed to consumers of social media via news feeds. This book argues that **a more effective means of avoiding fake news is to channel consumers' attention to higher quality sources.** If you're digging around in a dump, you can spend time flagging alot of items as "trash", but they will still just be trash. On the other hand if you take that time to actively seek information from trusted, quality professionals, then you will come across more quality content and you're less likely to have to worry about fake news in the first place.

According to a 2017 Digital News report, only 24% of news consumers think social media are successful at separating fact from fiction. There is slightly greater trust in mainstream media (40%), but still the numbers show pretty low levels of trust in the news we are consuming online on a daily basis.

One solution to verify levels of trustworthiness might be the use of blockchain. In summer 2017, the World Bank launched a specific lab initiative for distributed ledger technology, to identify areas where blockchain technology can create impact somewhere among the 80 countries that the organization works with. **For example, using blockchain, the DNN media initiative proposes a model where content is only published if there is consensus to do so amongst its content reviewers, rather than a central editing authority having the decision-making power.**

Other independent projects have emerged across the globe to combat fake news. Many are nationally focused, for example in Faktisk in Norway. Other initiatives like WikiTribune allow consumers - the community - to contribute news, so it is unclear how it will be vetted and seems to lack quality assurance.

-   Fact-checking organizations are doing their best

Fact-checking organizations are a good start. They check articles, but how do they decide which ones to check? Facebook, for example, has partnered with third party organizations worldwide that specialize in fact-checking, starting with the International Fact-Checking Network based at Poynter Institute. Google News has implemented a feature that indicates which articles have been fact-checked. The fact-checking has typically been done by a specialized fact-checking organization, like Snopes. Snopes has created a business of out collecting fake information or ´folklore´ from the internet, so that fact-checkers can cross-check an article with Snopes. If it has been picked up by Snopes then it is probably fake.

Cataloguing fake content in a website like Snopes is entertaining, but probably not the most efficient way of avoiding fake news. It´s like teaching your children all the rude behaviour you can think of in hopes that they will eventually realise what, in contrast, is nice behaviour - rather than simply teaching them nice behaviour from the start. This solution does not let consumers choose which news pieces to check, and also does not connect consumers directly with journalists close to the sources.

-   Can artificial intelligence detect fake news?

The Fake News Challenge is a leading artificial intelligence initiative attempting to find ways to flag fake news using artificial intelligence (AI), natural language processing and machine learning. They are a grassroots and global effort of over 100 volunteers and 71 teams from academia and industry. The project hosts competitions to attract the best artificial intelligence algorithms that might solve the problem. To date, the best algorithms put forth have only managed to help identify whether a news piece is likely to be fake. To be truly effective, the

algorithm needs to be used in combination with a human fact checker. This demonstrates the complexity of news reporting and publication - that for now, to achieve credibility, tracking and verifying sources still has to be done by real individuals.

The AI technology involves a combination of keyword analysis, tracking trends, and weighing reputed sources against unknown ones, to check whether an article is likely to be credible. Efforts essentially focus on flagging articles as either ´real´ or ´fake´. A few examples of such initiatives include Spike, Hoaxy, Snopes, CrowdTangle, Check, Google Trends, Le Decodex and Pheme. Methods include scoring websites for accuracy levels, comparing facts between different news websites, predicting the reputation of an unknown website or detecting the presence of sensational words that are more likely to show up in fake news pieces because they easily attract audience attention.

AI still has a long way to go before it can predictably and reliably flag fake news. A June 2017 Wired article quoted Jay Rosen, professor of journalism at New York University, saying that algorithms may help detect whether a news piece is likely to be 'fake news,' but those algorithms ¨will always work best in combination with a person with a sharp eye."

And even harnessing the latest AI technology at its best, the issue with this approach is that iit misses the point entirely. Chasing down fake articles is a gargantuan task, a myth of sisyphus, due to the sheer volume of online content. It is much more efficient to take a different approach altogether and channel customers´ attention to reputable sources. That is the approach that I suggest in this book, which is to simply scrap dubious sources rather than trying to chase fake news content and label it as such. **The solution: go straight to sources that you trust, from the start. Refocus consumer time and energy on content that comes from journalists they connect with directly and trust.**

In 2016, Google took action against 340 websites for misrepresenting content to users. This is only the tip of the iceberg, when you factor in that this number probably increased in 2017 and that many other fake content websites are out there but haven´t yet been detected by Google. With over a billion webpages out there, the amount of fake content circulating is tricky to

quantify exactly but we can say for sure that the volume is significant and therefore challenging to rake through even for sophisticated AI engines, let alone human fact-checkers.

4) Take control of your news intake: practical steps

- **Select your key productivity topics**

Curate your own news sources. Just like you chose what you eat, who you meet for coffee, where you shop for clothes. In a world where you have so much freedom of choice, why would we choose to relinquish control over our sources of information? If you feel that click patterns on the internet are leading you to random news sites and controlling what news you read, rest assured - you can regain control of your own news consumption!

First, identify what topics are relevant for you. These are your ´key productivity topics´ - the ones that really matter to you, that help you work toward your goals, or that you enjoy as entertainment. You can identify them by aligning each of your top goals (professional and personal) with one or more news topics, using the table on the following page.

Template table for identifying my key productivity topics:

	My top SMART* goals for these interests	Key related news topic	Where will I get news on this topic?
What are my two top professional interests?			
(1)			
(2)			
What are my two top other interests?			
(1)			
(2)			
Any other topic I really care about or need to know about that doesn´t fit in the categories above?			
* make sure the goals you identify in this column are SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely. There are a number of websites devoted to the SMART goal-setting method if you require more guidance.			

- Source news directly from real journalists

The best solution to avoid fake news is to get as close as possible to trusted sources. Ideally, connect directly with journalists you trust. This gets you as close to the sources as possible.

There is a need for a platform that enables you to verify the accuracy of any news piece and/or request follow-up information on any news topic. This would be done by connecting you with a real person - a journalist - who can access relevant sources for each topic. You could also request follow-up information for any topic, provided by a real person based on their sources.

The journalists powering the platform would have been vetted over the course of several years, exceptionally devoted to high ethical standards and with a proven record of trustworthy reporting. Because you are receiving information from a real person, you will always have the opportunity to question it and open a discussion. Any violation of quality standards - or suspicion of such violation - would be reported immediately and dealt with.

This way you would cut through the media industry´s current chaos and get right to the facts - by connecting directly with a trusted individual reporter who is ready to brief you. Focusing on the sources, keeping it simple. This is as close as you can possibly get to the sources of information, unless as a reader you have personal access to sources to contact them on your own.

- Treat publications like real people

Would you trust information from someone at a dinner party who is known to fabricate stories or who is known to be dishonest? In the same way that you filter information that you hear from people around you, you can filter the news publications you listen to by trying to be realistic about whether or not you believe they are trustworthy.

Choose one publication, or a handful of publications, that you like/trust and subscribe. Then simply block out the rest. You won't need more than that. Focusing your attention on just a few

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select, trusted sources also has the benefit of blocking out all the background noise that you get by clicking randomly through internet news stories whose sources and trustworthiness are not easily verifiable.

You can use this checklist for deciding which publication to choose:

1- Do I trust it?

2- Do I like the style?

3- Does it cover a majority of the topics I am most interested in?

4- Does the format fit my preferences? (website, podcast, print…)

5- Am I comfortable with the cost? (monetary)

6 - Am I comfortable with the time it takes over in my schedule?

7 - Will I miss anything crucial if I consume only this news source? (FOMO doesn't count!)

- **Catch-all for other news topics**

Schedule a coffee or call a friend or family member to stay in touch with all other topics that haven´t made it into your ´key productivity´ topics list. You can make a point of always asking your close ones what they have heard about in the news recently. This helps deepens the relationship by giving you insight on what topics they care about, while also getting some extra news updates. The news obtained this way is obviously less reliable, but for topics that are not your mail priority you can still get some clues about what is going on out there. All without needing to spend extra time or money on consuming news outside your key productivity areas. This method is also a simple FOMO buster!

- **Block out useless content to make room for useful news**

Both empirical research and personal experience point to the negative consequences of spending too much time aimlessly trolling through the internet. Once we settle at the keyboard, it is easy to stay there and just keep clicking mindlessly. Overusing the internet has shown to increase sedentary lifestyles. Examples of other symptoms include carpal tunnel syndrome, dry

eyes, migraine headaches and back pain, and even a decrease in personal hygiene, according to Maressa Hecht who founded Computer Addiction Services and is member of Harvard Medical School. According to the fifth edition of Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) handbook for mental health professionals, it is still debated whether so-called ¨Internet addiction¨ actually complies with the formal definition of an addiction - but this is largely an academic debate among professionals of psychology.

Either way, internet overuse or ¨addiction¨ affects over 12% of the US population, according to the Center for Internet Addiction. In a 2008 article in the "American Journal of Psychiatry" - which was written a while ago - Dr. Jerald J. Block argues Internet addiction should be included in the DSM-5. He defines the addiction as a compulsive activity involving social withdrawal as well negative effects like social isolation, low achievement and fatigue. Research points to the fact that excessive internet use leads to a loss of control over aspects of our behavior - for example, if we delay bedtime because we are caught up on the internet, or if we fail to answer our child´s question because we are too busy checking our smartphones. Many of us become absorbed in the internet so that we are no longer making an objective, reasoned decision at each given moment about whether we are actually interested in the content we´re consuming online.

So it´s easy to let time slip away while browsing yet another news item that we´ve stumbled across during an online session. Many of us have experienced opening an internet browser for the purposes of a very specific task (like messaging a friend to confirm a coffee meeting, or checking availability of a garment on a web shop, or responding to the last email from our boss) - and then we end up surfing among completely different websites, with the clock ticking and having forgotten why we opened the browser in the first place.

In terms of news consumption, if you can relate to any of the scenarios described above and have trouble limiting yourself to your Trusted Sources, you can use apps that help you keep tabs on how you are spending your time online. There are many to choose from - like Freedom, SelfControl, Cold Turkey, StayFocusd, Time Sink. Or for some, the most helpful approach might

be to skip these apps and simply allocate a specific time slot every day that is devoted to consuming news from your Trusted Sources.

Concluding remarks

Social media giants like Facebook and Google, as well as media-focused organisations like Poynter Institute and independent media outlets have all been taking active steps within the past year to find solutions for flagging and correcting fake news published online. The German Network Enforcement act passed in summer 2017 is one example of the steps policymakers are taking worldwide to tackle the fake news problem which ultimately impacts the democratic elections process and the trust that citizens hold in their elected governments, as has been illustrated by the story of the 2017 US elections. Alongside all these efforts, you can take control of your own news consumption starting today. And in the near future, **there is an urgent need for new models that channel consumers´ attention toward accurate reporting - and away from fake news.**

About the author:

As founder of the Center for Internet & Media Ethics CIME in 2007, Melisande Sandén (Middleton) has a ten-year track record working on improving media standards with communities in many corners of the globe - from Bhutan, Mongolia and Sub-Saharan Africa all the way to Thomson Reuters in London and partnerships with major media players like the Wall Street Journal. She previously worked as a journalist and has been a visiting scholar at the Oxford University Center for Comparative Law and Media Studies (PCMLP). Melisande is also an Information Technology and Innovation Expert at the World Economic Forum and a lawyer with a focus in information, communications & technology. She now coordinates CIME using the technology platform Qui.

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