Fight for Facts: Briefing Paper & Evaluation Framework (Version 3)

Introduction

1. Three closely related and interconnected sets of obligations give shape and direction to Newport Rising's new project, *Fight for Facts*. The first of these is to the charitable purpose of Our Chartist Heritage (OCH), the organisation behind Newport Rising. OCH's charitable purpose is '*the advancement of education for the public benefit in the history and heritage of the Chartist movement'.* In practice, this means we aim to enable more and a wider range of people to make meaningful connections between what happened in Newport on 4 November 1839 (the history of the Newport Rising) and their lives as citizens today (the heritage of the Newport Rising). In keeping with this central purpose, OCH is committed to defending and promoting Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which affirms the right of all to participate in the government of their country and civic life.

2. The second set of obligations is to The People's Postcode Trust, who have made a substantial grant to *Fight for Facts* under their theme of *Promoting Human Rights.* OCH has undertaken to research, design, deliver and evaluate online and face-to-face digital media literacy workshops to empower voters to discern and challenge fake news. This briefing paper and evaluation framework for the Project Development Officer constitutes the deliverable for the Phase One of the project: Preparatory Research. The success of the project overall will be evaluated against the following outcomes, originally presented in the successful application to The People's Postcode Trust:
    - a diverse range of participants will benefit from workshops tailored to their learning needs;
    - Newport will make a valuable contribution to promoting and defending Article 21 of the UDHR by educating citizens in ways that can be replicated across Wales and the UK; and
    - high levels of public interest in OCH's work will be reignited and our dedicated volunteer teams will be revitalised amid the challenges of Covid 19.

3. The third set of obligations, which flows ineluctably from the first and second sets, is to the people of Newport. OCH's educational purpose is not to advance education as an end in itself but education '*for the public benefit'.* The public whom the work of OCH is intended to benefit are the citizens and voters of Newport, including future voters, who have the right to vote and participate in civic life thanks in large part to the Chartist Movement, which advocated social change through electoral reform. They are the *demos* (or 'people') embedded in the word 'democracy'*.* The People's Postcode Trust and OCH both share a commitment to promoting human rights, with OCH focused specifically on democratic human rights. The community programme under which The People's Postcode Trust made the award to OCH is focused on small, local charities and good causes and, as the Trust's name suggests, expects awards to have a tangible, positive impact on the people who live in a specified locality. OCH describes itself as a grass-roots organisation whose activities are predicated on the Chartist-inspired belief that positive change can be achieved when people work together for the common good.

4. With these three sets of obligations in mind, OCH initiated Phase One: Preparatory Research of the *Fight for Facts* project. Given that the purpose of Phase One is to inform and guide the remaining phases of *Fight for Facts*: Phase Two (Project Development); and Phase Three (Project Delivery and Evaluation), the decision was taken to focus attention initially on publications explicitly concerned with the project's key concepts: 'fake news' and/or 'media literacy' interventions. It quickly became clear that the volume of articles published on the topic of fake news has increased dramatically since the US presidential election and the UK's Brexit referendum in 2016, becoming 'a blooming topic of research' (Wang, 2020.2). Most of the research articles about media literacy have been published over a longer span of 40 years (Potter, 2010) but the content has shifted significantly in the last decade to include digital media, especially the relationship between digital news media and social media. For these reasons, this Briefing Paper concentrates on publications from the last decade, with a strong emphasis on studies undertaken over the last five years. As befits a project that aims to empower voters to discern and challenge 'fake news', the paper is weighted towards peer-reviewed, evidence-based academic research but it also considers governmental and non-governmental reports, documentaries, newspaper articles, opinion pieces, blogs and conference presentations. Its orientation is not, however, 'academic' in the narrowest, derogatory sense of that adjective but is rather, in the words of Mihailidis (2018a; 2018b), intentionally focused on the 'civic', understood as 'the virtues, assets and activities that a free people need to govern themselves well' (EDA, 2021.9) and the collective pursuit of the common good.

Purpose of the *Fight for Facts* project and evidence of need

5. The language employed in the literature to convey the gravity and ubiquity of the threat posed by fake news often borders on the hyperbolic and sensational, as if authors feel the need to raid the playbook of purveyors of disinformation to get their message across. For example, The Media Literacy Index 2019, otherwise a measured and sober presentation and analysis of data relating to media literacy levels in 35 European countries, adopts a rather different and arresting tone in its opening paragraph:

   > 'In January 2019, the scientists behind Doomsday Clock, which warns about the dangers of nuclear annihilation, added "the manipulation of facts, fake news and information overload" to the list of threats that might destroy our planet. "The new abnormal" as they called it is the "moment in which fact is becoming indistinguishable from fiction, undermining our very abilities to develop and apply solutions to the big problems of our time' (Lessenski, 2019.3)

6. In a style reminiscent of the gloomy forecasts of Project Fear in the 2016 Brexit referendum campaign, Lewandowsky et al (2017.354) invite readers to contemplate a dystopian future that may feel even closer to reality in 2021 than it did just five years ago:

   > 'Imagine a world that has had enough of experts. That considers knowledge to be "elitist". Imagine a world in which it is not expert knowledge but an opinion market on Twitter that determines whether a newly emergent strain of avian flu is really contagious to humans, or whether greenhouse gas

emissions do in fact cause global warming, as 97% of domain experts say they do. In this world, power lies with those most vocal and influential on social media: from celebrities and big corporations to botnet puppeteers who can mobilize millions of tweetbots or sock puppets – that is fake online personas through which a small group of people can create an illusion of widespread opinion'.

7. Others recount egregious examples of fake news with potentially serious consequences in the real world, some of which came to pass, including examples of Russia's use of *kompromat* in the information war with Ukraine (Khaldarova and Pantti, 2016) and conspiracy theories such as those behind the 'Pizzagate' incident during the 2016 US presidential elections (Tandoc et al, 2018; Buckingham, 2017). They make an uncomfortable read for the reviewer, who gets drawn in by the seductive power of these sensational stories until they provoke shock and outrage twice over: the first time through the immediate and emotional reaction to the scandalous nature of the fake story itself; and the second through a more cerebral reflection on the reading experience and the malign, strategic audacity of its originators.

8. In a succinct but wide-ranging review of what we currently know and do not know about fake news, Anstead (2021.49-51) presents a nuanced and contextualised assessment of the state of play, which reads like an antidote to some of the inflated language often associated with fake news. He suggests that the most important enquiry is to establish 'what are the effects of fake news'. He prefaces his response by reminding the reader that research testing the 'minimal effects thesis' has shown consistently since the 1940s that election campaigns rarely succeed in changing the voting intentions of citizens. He notes, however, this may be less the case in a single-issue referendum campaign that is not divided along party lines. He offers a set of alternative effects that may be at work during a campaign: mobilisation/demobilisation effects, which increase or suppress voter turn-out; reinforcement effects, which strengthen beliefs and attitudes that the voter already held prior to the campaign; agenda-setting effects, that shape voters' views about which issues take priority over others; and framing effects, which locate issues within one discourse rather than another and influence the way in which they are understood and seen in relation to other issues. In light of research focused on these alternative effects, Anstead concludes that the 'potential of fake news to cause the greatest damage is not at the level of the individual, but instead at the level of political debate and institutions.'

9. So, what can and should be done about fake news? Some call for governmental and intergovernmental intervention, for example to regulate social media companies, by changing their legal status so that they are required, like publishers, to take responsibility for the veracity and integrity of material distributed under their auspices (DCMS, 2019; National Literacy Trust, 2018). The Media Literacy Index (Lessenski, 2019.15) cautions against 'blanket regulations that cover all cases or instances', however, since they can have the unintended consequence of curtailing free speech and a free press, both pillars of healthy democratic societies, as illustrated by Malaysia's recently abandoned experiment. Other interventions considered within the literature fall into the categories of prevention and/or treatment.

10. Prevention typically entails a form of digital media literacy intervention, designed to 'inoculate' users against the negative effects of fake news. The Educating for American Democracy (EAD) *Roadmap* (2021. 8), for example, sets forth 'goals and guidance for 21st-century history and civic education, in support of civic strength' to be used by 'national, state, tribal and local leaders'. The *Roadmap* is advisory but accompanied by 'a call to civic duty'. To protect children's wellbeing and sustain their trust in both journalism and democracy, The National Literacy Trust (2018.31) proposes that the UK adopt '*The Children's Charter on Fake News*', which has education in critical literacy skills at its heart. In Finland, the national government has concluded that its best hope of mitigating the effects of aggressive disinformation campaigns emanating from Russia is to provide systematic digital media literacy education to all citizens (Guardian, January 2020). The pilot programme was overseen by a high-level committee comprising 20 representative bodies including government ministries, welfare organisations, police and security services. With thousands of teachers, librarians, journalists and civil servants already trained, it comes as no surprise that Finland consistently tops the ranking of European countries in terms of their resilience to fake news and the post-truth phenomenon (Lessenski, 2017-19). Hameleers (2020) suggests, however that the efficacy of digital media literacy interventions tends to be limited to the perceived accuracy of misinformation without effecting levels of agreement with the false statements and cannot therefore solve the problem in isolation.

11. Treatment typically takes the form of fact-checking and correction after the event. The general consensus in the literature is that fact-checking is a useful addition to the toolkit, especially when combined with broader preventative digital media literacy skills (Hameleers, 2020). However, it too has several perceived shortcomings as a remedy when operating in isolation; these are concerned with salience, reach and readership. Long before the arrival of social media, it was the case that apologies and corrections to misleading articles in the mainstream new media were often delayed, short on explanatory information contextualising the correction and buried where they were least likely to draw attention. Given the variety of ways in which people receive their newsfeeds today, it is even less likely that users of social media sites will chance upon apologies and corrections to a particular fake news story they have encountered, unless they make a conscious effort to do so (Vargo et al, 2017). Corrections do not spread as rapidly or as widely as fake news, so there is no necessary correlation between the readership of trustworthy fact-checking sites and those who have been misled by particular fake news items.

12. Even if the effort is made, there is no guarantee that fact-checking will succeed in counteracting the effects of fake news stories. Research into the efficacy of fact-checking has produced mixed results but it does suggest that selective exposure to fake news, will render fact-checking less effective, unless the reader accords greater value to facticity than to hearing stories that reinforce their pre-existing beliefs or provoke in them a positive emotional response (Bakir and McStay, 2017; Hameleers, 2020; Lazer et al, 2018). In some circumstances, for example when the correction challenges a person's worldview or even just repeats the false information in order to correct it, there is evidence of the 'continued influence effect' that perpetuates and intensifies belief in fake news, against the evidence, about topics such as the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq or the safety of vaccines (Lazer et al, 2018;

Lewandowsky et al, 2017). To add to these problems, fake fact-checking sites exist and, like fake news stories they often mimic the genuine article all too convincingly and undermine digital media literacy interventions by falsely verifying fake news (Hameleers, 2020). For example, during the televised leaders' debate during the 2019 UK general election campaign, the Conservative Party rebranded its official Twitter account as *@factcheckUK,* changing its logo and using it to push pro-Tory and anti-Labour material to the public (Guardian, November 2019; Daily Mail, November 2019).

13. The declared purpose of the *Fight for Facts* project, as stated above, is the empowerment of voters (including future voters) to discern and challenge fake news. The key terms entered into academic databases to search for relevant literature for review were initially 'fake news' and 'media literacy' because they featured in the application to The People's Postcode Trust. The reference to 'voters' as the beneficiaries of the project makes it clear, however, that OCH is focusing on the threat fake news presents to us all as citizens in a democratic society rather than, for example, as users of health services or consumers of goods. The threat to democracy quickly emerged as a dominant theme both in articles selected to kick-start the process of selection and those that were included following a subsequent 'snowball' exercise (Cohen et al, 2018) to extend the number and range of samples. There is a clear consensus in the literature reviewed that the health of any democracy is dependent upon well informed, active citizens and that the fake news or post-truth phenomenon constitutes a serious and present threat to both citizens themselves and democratic institutions and processes (Bennett and Livingston, 2018; Lessenski, 2017-19; Lewandowsky et al, 2017.354; Molina et al, 2021).

14. The threat fake news presents to democracy is perceived to be operating throughout the world, at multiple levels and in relation to a range of democratic institutions and processes. A reading of the final report of the House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee into disinformation and fake news (DCMS, 2019) provides perturbing insights into the ways in which powerful tech companies, who behave 'as if they were monopolies in their specific area' (paragraph 14) provide the digital infrastructure that facilitates the spread of fake news, which rapidly permeates different strata of political life from the global community to the individual voter and everything in between. At one end of the scale, Guardian correspondent, Luke Harding draws *inter alia* on the 2019 DCMS report in a book that documents, in meticulous detail, Russian intervention in both the US presidential election and the Brexit referendum in 2016:

> 'Moscow's playbook in the UK was the same as in the US. The goal was to promote divisive "hot button" issues that would warm the electorate's prejudices. Immigration, refugees from Syria, Muslim terrorism, attacks by ISIS sympathisers in Manchester and London…all were pushed remotely from Russia. There is even evidence that (Russian) trolls promoted Scottish independence…When the independence referendum was defeated in 2014, the same St Petersburg trolls spread claims that the vote was rigged' (Harding, 2021.193)

15. At the other end of the scale, citizens were found to be ill-equipped to cope with the onslaught. In the US, for example, a substantial and influential 18-month assessment of

the media literacy skills of middle school, high school and college students, conducted by Stanford History Education Group, drew the depressing conclusion that the participants' ability to reason about information on the internet was spectacularly and consistently 'bleak', leaving researchers deeply concerned that democracy itself is under threat from 'the ease at which disinformation about civic issues is allowed to spread and flourish' (Wineberg et al, 2016.4).

16. Part of the problem is that contemporary social media present news content as if it were a commercial product and this positions users as consumers in a marketplace, rather than as citizens accessing information as a vital public service (Baym, 2005). Loss of confidence in the reliability of information can deprive a democracy of the well informed and trusting citizenry it needs to function and undermine the authority of democratic institutions charged with issuing trustworthy information (Bennet and Livingston, 2018). The bitter legacy of both the US presidential election and the Brexit referendum in 2016 attests that 'if losers lose based on what they perceive to be the winner's false claims, then ensuing discontent with the democratic outcome and process is likely' Bakir and McStay (2017.162). OCH is committed to playing a small but important role in mitigating the ill effects of disinformation and the resulting disaffection and cynicism of citizens through digital media literacy provision that 'empowers people to be critical thinkers and makers, effective communicators and active citizens' (NAMLE, 2007).

17. In a TED talk entitled *Facebook's role in Brexit - and the threat to democracy*, the Guardian journalist Carole Cadwalladr reflects on an investigative article she wrote about why 62% of the South Wales Valleys voted 'leave' in the 2016 Brexit referendum. The article focused on Ebbw Vale, a small town that had benefited from significant funding from the European Union, which was staunchly left-wing Labour and had exceptionally low immigration rates. Following publication, a local resident contacted Cadwalladr to explain she had been persuaded to vote leave by 'all this stuff' on Facebook about 'immigration and especially about Turkey' (02.59). Cadwalladr's research unearthed no evidence of the 'stuff' because an individual's newsfeed is seen by nobody else and then vanishes without a trace. She ends her talk with a powerful call to action, inspired by, amongst other things, the Chartist movement:

> 'The history of the South Wales Valleys is of a fight for rights. And this is not a drill – it is a point of inflection. Democracy is not guaranteed, and it is not inevitable, and we have to fight and we have to win and we cannot let these tech companies have this unchecked power. It's up to us – you, me, all of us. We are the ones who have to take back control' (14:26)

Key concepts: fake news and media literacy

Fake news

18. A significant proportion of the academic literature is preoccupied with defining fake news and/or constructing typologies of fake news and/or charting the history and evaluating the usefulness of the concept (Allcott, and Gentzkow, 2017; Anstead, 2021; Tandoc et al, 2018; Wang, 2020). Although the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee decided eventually to drop 'fake news' and adopt instead 'misinformation' (defined as 'the inadvertent sharing of false information' and 'disinformation'(defined as 'the deliberate creation and sharing of false and/or manipulated information that is intended to deceive and mislead audiences, either for the purposes of causing harm, or for political, personal or financial gain' (DCMS, 2019.paragraph 12), their substantive and frank report makes it clear that 'definitions in this field matter' (DCMS, 2019.paragraph 2). The process of trying to define 'fake news' constantly begs the question of what constitutes 'real news'. Definitions of fake news are often unhelpfully expressed in negative terms (Anstead 2021), invoking the contrast between fake and 'real' news without elaborating on the implied characteristics of the latter or scrutinising the validity of the claims of mainstream news media to the moral high ground (Guess et al, 2019; Lazer et al, 2018; Molina et al, 2021). This is not a new issue; Baym (2005.261) pointed out 16 years ago that it was rare in debates about fake news for an '*authentic* or *legitimate* set of news practices' (Baym's emphasis) to be articulated, let alone to find evidence of them in operation.

19. Three broad motivations for generating and circulating fake news have been identified: financial gain and commercial profit; geo-political conflict (where one state uses disinformation to undermine the political institutions and stability of another); and the promotion of ideological or partisan points of view (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Anstead, 2021). The distinguishing characteristics of 'fake news' variously employed in the literature include: the originator's or publisher's intention to deceive, the verifiable falseness of the content and the likelihood of it being taken at face value by readers (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017). Following analysis of 34 academic articles that were published between 2003 and 2017, and employ the term fake news, Tandoc et al (2018) created a typology of fake news (news satire, news parody, fabrication, manipulation, advertising and propaganda) which they distributed along two axes: facticity (high to low) and intention to deceive (high to low). This framework could provide a reasonably useful basis for gauging the level of harm the many different forms of 'fake news' are likely to cause. The authors acknowledge, however, that it does not take into account the way in which users of social media negotiate and share meaning in that environment and may or may not go on to co-create fake news by giving credence to it.

20. Fake news has generated a 'fluid terminology' (Vosoughi et al, 2018.1148), which may include, for example: news satire, yellow journalism, junk news, pseudo-news, hoax news, propaganda news, advertorial, false information, fake information, misinformation, disinformation, mal-information, alternative fact, and post-truth (Wang, 2020); or myths, rumours, conspiracy theories, hoaxes as well as deceptive or erroneous content (Apuke and Omara, 2021). To this list can be added '*kompromat*': 'fake news in the form of propaganda entertainment, a combination of scandalous material, blame and denunciations, dramatic music and misleading images taken out of context (Oates, 2014

quoted in Khaldarova and Pantii, 2016.893). Equally fluid is the terminology used to describe categories which may be excluded from the definition of fake news, for example: ‘unintentional reporting error, rumours not originating from a specific news article, conspiracy theories, satire that is unlikely to be misconstrued, false statements by politicians, slanted or misleading reports that are not outright false’ (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017).

21. The plethora of overlapping categories and the porous nature of the boundaries between them raise serious questions about the status of fake news as a key organising concept and its usefulness to this field of enquiry and educational interventions. The term has been in use for almost a century (McKernon, 1925) but its contemporary ubiquity, currency, industrial scale and cynicism is unprecedented, making it impossible to ignore. Allcott and Gentzkow (2017.211) draw attention to the ‘dramatically different structure’ of fake news today within which ‘content can be relayed among users with no significant third-party filtering, fact-checking, or editorial judgment’. Although Grinberg et al (2019) found that the vast majority of exposures to political news on Twitter during the 2016 US presidential election still came from mainstream new sources, Allcott and Gentzkow (*ibid)* comment on the American public’s loss of confidence in the ability of the mass media in general to cover news fully and fairly, a decline in trust echoed in other parts of the world (Apuke and Omara, 2021, Media Literacy Index, 2017-19; Onumah, 2018; Lin, 2018). The mainstream print and digital news media are not exempt from the pressures caused by the relentless immediacy of the news cycle today, which leaves little time for the quality assurance processes advocated by Allcott and Gentzkow; fact-checking can deal effectively with established facts but cannot deal instantaneously with emerging news (Bakir and McStay, 2017; Molina et al, 2021).

22. Some argue that the catch-all term ‘fake news’ should be replaced by a more meaningful generic term such as ‘information disorders’ (Bennett and Livingston, 2018; Corbu et al, 2019; Wardle, and Derakhshan, 2017) while others advocate parsing fake news into categories defined by the nature of the falsehood and the intention of the originator/publisher, for example, misinformation and disinformation, (DCMS, 2019; Hameleers, 2020; Molina et al, 2021). For others, the concept of fake news became redundant when its meaning was ‘irredeemably polarised’ to signify views with which one is not in accord, regardless of the veracity of the information in question (Vosoughi et al, 2018.1147). Others argue for its retention because ‘its political salience draws attention to an important subject’ (Lazer et al, 2018.1095). Anstead (2021, 6-7) takes this further, identifying three manifestations of fake news: as comedy (see for example Baym, 2005); as misleading information (see for example Guess et al, 2019); and as populist discourse (see Vosoughi et al, 2018.1147). Anstead (2021.8) suggests that these three very different forms of fake news crucially have this in common: they all ‘represent distinct responses to an ongoing and evolving crisis in democratic and media legitimacy’.

<u>Media literacy</u>

23. Unlike ‘fake news’, the concept of media literacy has not yet succeeded in capturing the public’s imagination nor has it become a major news topic in its own right. It has however been the object of sustained academic critical enquiry for longer than fake news. Zettl (1998.81, quoted in Potter, 2010) complained 23 years ago that the ‘plethora of scholarly articles and other material helps little in defining what is media literacy’. The more recent

literature reviewed for this paper does not seem to share Zettl's frustration, indeed many refer to a seminal definition proposed five years before Zettl's complaint, which defines media literacy as a skillset: 'the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, create and act, using all forms of communication' (Aufderheide, 1993). There is general agreement that media literacy is a vital skill for every user of media (Lewandowsky et al, 2017; Lim and Tan, 2020; Wineberg et al 2016))

24. Using Aufderheide's definition as a point of departure, a review of academic literature by Rasi et al (2021.38) identifies three key areas to which media literacy contributes: '(a) democracy, participation and active citizenship; (b) choice, competitiveness and the knowledge economy; and (c) lifelong learning, cultural expression and personal fulfilment (Livingston et al, 2005)'. The first of these is of particular interest to the *Fight for Facts* project but several articles highlight the advantages of a learner-centred teaching strategy that begins by identifying the ways in which participants already use social and news media in order to build skills and understanding from a foundation of pre-existing confidence and competence (Mihailidis, 2020; Rasi et al, 2020). Media literacy is multi-dimensional and what it means in practice varies from one person to another, or according to the stage-of-life an individual has reached, or to the different roles an individual is playing in society at any one time (Potter, 2010). Measuring and evaluating citizens' media literacy is therefore challenging and, to date, no comprehensive means of doing this has been identified (Rasi et al, 2019).

25. The Media Literacy Index (Lessenski, 2017-19) gets around this problem by identifying four predictors of media literacy (operationalised by weighted sets of indicators) that function as proxy metrics to rank levels of resilience to the post-truth phenomenon among 33-35 countries in Europe: level and quality of education; state and quality of the media environment; trust in society; usage of new tools of participation. The UK has consistently been ranked in the second of five clusters, which is characterised by 'good performance'. Its rating has slipped slightly year-on-year, from the middle to the bottom of the cluster, from 9/33 to 12/35 and from a score of 62 to 60. Untypically for those countries placed in the second cluster, both France and the UK show levels of distrust in journalists more typical of countries from lower clusters, combined with media literacy scores more in line with the highest scoring cluster.

Contextualising the *Fight for Facts* project

26. In an opinion piece looking at characteristics of media literacy in East Asia, Lin (2018) emphasises the importance of contextualising interventions, if we are to understand, compare and evaluate them. Lin's focus is on geographical/geo-political factors affecting media literacy education. The article illustrates how the same vocabulary may mask important differences in approach and describes first how East Asia first borrowed the terminology of media literacy from the West and then went on to assimilate the same terminology in culturally different ways. Lin then illustrates how diverse political agendas within a region, for example between China and South Korea, can further differentiate approaches to both theory and practice, leading to the conclusion that it would be wise to regard media literacy as 'an evolving and diversifying set of discourses'.

27. Anstead (2021.64) makes a connection between the evolving and diversifying discursive environment of media literacy education and the rapidly shifting and expanding digital environment, where change is the only constant. He refers to a study by Jones-Jang et al (2019), which compares the efficacy of four types of literacy in enabling people to identify fake news: media literacy (focused on how news is produced): news literacy (focused on the relationship between news and the roles of citizens in democratic society); digital literacy (focused on how online news is constructed); and information literacy. Only the latter is found to have a significant correlation with the ability to discern fake news. Its efficacy is attributed to its singular focus on ensuring that the skills needed to access, evaluate and judge online information keep pace with the ever-changing digital environment. For both Anstead and for OCH it is a poor answer, however, or rather it is an answer that makes it clear that the question must be articulated in a radically different way. Anstead moves on to raise 'a much broader discussion about our ideas of truth and how it relates to politics'; OCH must also move on, because a transactional arrangement to equip voters with the skills to discern fake news does not do enough to further OCH's charitable purpose.

The research context, with particular focus on demographic differences in susceptibility to fake news

28. The second stage of the research phase of the *Fight for Facts* project was described in OCH's application to The People's Postcode Trust as 'desk-based research on comparative analyses/evaluations of worldwide educational interventions adopting a media literacy approach'. The first thing OCH learnt from this exercise is that rigorous comparative studies of digital media literacy interventions do not yet exist; the area of specific interest to the project is still too new and it is part of OCH's task to make a modest contribution to its development (Hameleers, 2020; Lazer et al 2018). The research is plentiful and fascinating but its findings are often contradictory, contested, limited in scope, provisional and demonstrate more confidence in identifying gaps in knowledge than in filling them.

29. Much basic, evidence-based information about the prevalence and impact of fake news is missing. Lazer et al (2018.1095) provide a useful summary of these lacunae noting, for example, that researchers can access data about the number of 'likes' or 'shares' an item of fake news has received on social media but that these tell us nothing about how many users have actually read or been influenced by that item. Similarly, researchers have speculated about whether sharing fake news implies an endorsement of its content that may boost its impact on the recipient but they have no conclusive evidence either way. The literature is virtually silent on the impact of fake news on political behaviour in the medium to long-term and short on evaluations of its capacity to effect attitudinal change by, for example, inducing cynicism and apathy at one end of the spectrum or extremism at the other.

30. So what sort of people are likely to be susceptible to fake news? According to Corbu et al (2020), most of us would respond to the question like this: "Well certainly not me! The people I am close to are probably not quite as sharp as I am when it comes to detecting fake news but they are not completely naïve either. However other people, those who are not like me or the people I mix with, they would be much more likely to be deceived". This sort of response is known as 'the third person effect', about which a large and

wide-ranging body of research has accumulated since the publication of a seminal study by Davison (1983). The third person effect posits that individuals are likely to underestimate the influence that media have on them or members of their in-group, while overestimating the influence they have on distant others or members of their out-groups. Despite the rich seam of research, little had been done until recently on the third person effect in relation to fake news. To remedy this, Corbu et al (2020.165) conducted a national survey of *N=813* Romanian adults, using a diverse sample in terms of gender, education, age, political interest and political ideology. They found evidence that several pre-established predictors of third person effect *(*Corbu et al, 2017) were operating in relation to fake news: higher education, which gives its beneficiaries a general sense of superiority and greater knowledge; a high level of political interest and awareness, which makes people feel they are well informed and skilled in navigating the terrain; confirmation bias, which means that news that accords with pre-existing beliefs and values is more likely to be deemed trustworthy; and the level of people's exposure to fake news. While age was found to be a non-significant factor, low dependency on Facebook was correlated with significant third person effect because respondents who rarely used Facebook themselves assumed close and distant others would be much more dependent on Facebook for news and therefore more vulnerable than they were themselves.

31. Several studies of the 2016 US presidential election campaign attempt to identify predictors of accurate discernment of true and false news and of the sharing of fake news on social media. For example, having found evidence that Republicans were generally more credulous of both fake and authentic news posts than Democrats, Allcott and Gentzkow (2017.228-30) conducted further analysis of their data to find out whether their initial focus on differences between parties was obscuring key factors associated with affiliation to one particular party. Three such factors were found to be significantly correlated to accurate discernment: age, education and level of media consumption. People who were older, those who were educated to a higher level and those who spend more time accessing news media, were more likely to be able to identify fake news as false. When partisan or ideological attachment is added to the mix, however, three further variables complicate these findings: those who spend more time accessing news media and those who move within segregated social networks were more likely to perceive articles aligned with their beliefs as accurate, while voters who remained 'undecided' until late in the campaign were not likely to do so.

32. Another study looked at the prevalence of fake news and attempted to identify predictors of users sharing it via Facebook during the 2016 US presidential election campaign (Guess et al, 2019). Its findings come close to contradicting some of the findings of Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), while echoing others. Those who are older, especially aged 65+, and those with conservative leanings were found to be more likely to share fake news. The article makes it clear, however, that while sharing in general happened frequently, the sharing of fake news on Facebook was a relatively rare occurrence, emanating primarily from a small sample of respondents with these characteristics. Age was found to be the strongest predictor for sharing fake news, even when data were controlled for education, partisanship and ideology. A study of fake news exposure and sharing on Twitter during the same period found that those most likely to be exposed to fake news and to share it were conservative leaning, older people who were highly

engaged with political news (Grinberg et al, 2019). As with the previous study, the group generating these tweets was highly concentrated, with 1% or fewer individuals accounting for almost 80% of fake news exposures and sharings. It is worth noting here that age did not feature among the predictors of sharing of authentic news, which are more varied (Guess et al, 2019).

33. These studies all raise interesting questions about the ways in which being educated to a higher level or having pre-existing partisan and/or ideological attachments function as predictors. It could be argued that a higher level of education should sharpen a person's critical faculties and make them better able to discriminate between authentic and fake news. Conversely, a person with higher education may use their enhanced critical capabilities to convince themselves and others of the trustworthiness of disinformation that accords with their pre-existing loyalties and beliefs, a cognitive function known as 'motivated reasoning'. Two studies conducted by Pennycook and Rand (2019.41) considered susceptibility to fake news in relation to motivated reasoning and 'classical reasoning', which would link 'the propensity to engage deliberative reasoning processes…. with skepticism (*sic)* about epistemologically suspect beliefs'. They conclude that classical reasoning does help to discriminate accurately between trustworthy and untrustworthy information but that individuals who are capable of using it do not always take the trouble to do so. In their words, the problem is not because people are biased and protecting their identity with motivated reasoning but because they are lazy and fail to think it through at all. The authors acknowledge, however, that these results may have been influenced by the way the questions were framed around the concept of facticity and that a focus on political or ideological identity or emotions might have yielded different results.

34. It is difficult to disentangle from the academic literature the different ways in which age may influence an individual's susceptibility to fake news. For example, age was found to be significant in relation to third person effect, only in respect of how people position themselves in relation to distant others: young people believe the gap is wider than older people. Lim and Tan (2020.533) warn the reader not to assume that the digital skills of young people translate into an ability to assess the reliability of online information. We have already seen that older age, considered in isolation, has been found to be one of the predictors of the ability accurately to distinguish between trustworthy and untrustworthy news (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017), while in other studies those aged 65+ were found to be more likely to be exposed to and sharing fake news, albeit as a very small sample of the population studied (Grinberg et al, 2019). Once again, the framing of the research question and methodology may be skewing the findings in relation to older age. Analysis of data drawn from 40 articles about media literacy interventions with older-aged people, selected from 28 journals spanning 17 countries and 14 years, found common weaknesses in the approaches adopted (Rasi et al, 2019). For example, even when researchers accorded high value to participation in society, studies focused on older aged people demonstrated relative neglect of creative approaches and outcomes, which received greater attention with younger groups of participants. Furthermore, researchers tended to address older-aged people mainly as agents in the sphere of their personal lives while failing to recognise other roles they continued to play in wider society such as citizens, consumers, leaders, workers, retirees, partners, carers, grandparents or users of leisure facilities.

The digital media ecology, mainstream media and the socio-political context

35. Anstead (2021.24) devotes a chapter of his book to tracing a selective history of trustworthy and untrustworthy information within a Western cultural context. While his account make no claims to be exhaustive, Anstead draws from it four key lessons, two of which are relevant here: first that we should recognise the power of technological developments to destabilise prevailing truth systems but should avoid adopting a reductionist stance of technological determinism; and second, that it is in the very nature of periods of socio-economic and political instability that alternative accounts of what constitutes truth will emerge and challenge the authority of the prevailing arbiters of truth and falsehood.

36. The *Fight for Facts* project is also keen to locate the fake news crisis in the context of a long history of destabilising technological innovation and political lying. From the outset, OCH has planned to build into the workshop curriculum the investigation of conflicting accounts and interpretations of the events of November 1839. The purpose of this is fourfold: first to deepen participants' understanding of the current crisis by comparing and contrasting coverage of a significant historical event and a contemporary story; second to make a meaningful connection between the democratic rights for which the Chartists were campaigning and the democratic principles that are currently under threat from fake news; and third to engender a sense of civic pride in the role the Newport Rising played in the ultimate achievement of universal suffrage; and fourth to engage participants in identifying ways in which they can redeploy the technology that threatens democratic values to work together for the common good.

37. The story of the Chartist movement and uprising in Newport and the Gwent Valleys does not offer easy answers to uncomfortable issues but it often provides a fascinating lens through which to consider them. In his authoritative history of the last armed uprising in the UK, Jones (1986.199-202) considers the plethora of theories generated in the aftermath of Newport Rising to try to explain what forces were driving it, despite the 'secret and baffling nature of the evidence'. Newspapers printed conflicting accounts, variously blaming 'Whig tolerance of radical reform, Tory antipathy towards the new Poor Law and the inadequacies of the local magistrates'. Other investigations attributed the rising to the 'neglect, demoralization and ignorance' that characterised Wales and the Welsh. Later, during the trials, others began to question whether the riot had been 'manufactured'. In a remarkable parallel with current conspiracy theories, some believed the rising was part of a wider plot to enable the government to legislate for the removal of civil liberties, while 'one small group of radicals saw it as part of a massive Russian plot to undermine the integrity of western nations'.

38. This paper has been written in the throes of the Covid 19 pandemic, within five years of Trump's election to the US presidency and Vote Leave's victory in the Brexit Referendum, all of which have contributed to a state of acute worldwide instability, frequently exacerbated by disinformation campaigns calculated to deepen divisions along pre-existing fault-lines (Bennet and Livingston, 2018; Corbu et al, 2020). 'Post-truth' was named the word of the year in 2016 by Oxford Dictionaries, 'fake news' by Collins Dictionary in 2017 and 'misinformation' by Dictionary.com in 2018.

Lewandowsky et al (2017.357) identify the following societal trends as likely to have contributed to the emergence of a post-truth world: decline in social capital and shifting values; growing inequality; increasing polarisation; declining trust in science; politically asymmetric credulity; and the evolution of the media landscape.

39. A computational analysis of the media landscape between 2014-16 concluded that the volume of content generated by fake news websites was increasing and that the agendas of different fake news websites were diverging and becoming more autonomous (Vargo and Amazeen, 2017.16). Throughout the period there was evidence of a closely interconnected relationship between fake news sites and partisan media, with the former taking cues from the latter in relation to topics such as the economy, education, the environment, international relations, religion, taxes and unemployment. In 2016, the year of the US presidential election campaign, partisan media became notably more receptive to fake news media stories. Fact-checking sites were found to be operating autonomously: they determined what stories they would check independently of news media and exercised no influence on the agendas of news media. As a result, corrections never spread as widely as misinformation. Factcheckers tended to deal with the stories they selected on a case-by-case basis, only latterly paying attention to 'on-going storylines'.

40. Vargo and Amazeen (*ibid*) maintain a sharp focus on one aspect of the digital media ecology but in most of the literature reviewed authors do not attempt to analyse either the mediascape or the socio-political and economic context of the last 5-6 years in isolation from one another. In particular, they draw attention to the ways in which digital technologies facilitate the generation of alternative forms of truth and undermine trust in the authority of social, political and economic institutions hitherto regarded as trustworthy. They observe that the financial decline of mainstream news media has run in tandem with the rapid evolution of a burgeoning, flexible digital media ecology (Bakir and McStay, 2017) which lacks the significant barriers to entry that helped to assure the broad homogeneity and quality of news output in the past (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017).

41. Not very long ago, whatever the political leanings of different players, the output of the press and broadcast media reached those who were interested in reading it in an identical form that could easily be archived and researched. The proliferation of digital media has splintered this homogeneity, offering increased and customised choice to users leading to what Lewandowsky et al (2017.359) describe as 'greater heterogeneity among audiences in the extent to which they are misinformed about important issues'. Although the new digital ecology is dominated by a few powerful big tech companies, it tends towards fractionation at the user end, where there is money to be made by capitalising on the algorithms used by social media platforms and internet search engines (Bakir and McStay, 2017), tailoring newsfeeds to individuals' pre-existing beliefs, attitudes and biases. This process produces conditions conducive to the development of 'alternative epistemic realities', often likened to echo chambers or filter bubbles, which Lewandowsky et al (2017.360) believe have created a powerful incentive for politicians to engage in 'strategic extremism' by targeting communications to self-referential partisan bubbles, without risk of alienating more moderate others they may wish to keep on board.

42. The benefits and attractions of social media notwithstanding, online political discourse is not for the faint-hearted. Emotionalism (Bakir and McStay, 2017) sensationalism, outrage and aggressive incivility are the hallmarks of interchanges between users, who are typically psychologically distanced from one another and tend to conform to negative group behaviours that would be out character for them in other environments (Lewandowsky et al, 2017). An investigation into the attitudes of young people towards using some popular social communication modalities for civic purposes showed that participants tended to restrict their use of social media to passive consumption and personal rather than public sharing. They had learned through experience to be wary of the hostility they might encounter online if they expressed themselves (Mihailidis, 2020).

Recommendations for the design, delivery and evaluation of the *Fight for Facts* digital news media literacy workshops

43. The purpose of Phase One: Preparatory Research is to inform and guide the remaining two phases of *Fight for Facts*: Project Development; and Project Delivery and Evaluation (see paragraph 4 above). The final section of this paper therefore draws on articles and reports in the literature that focus on the design, delivery and evaluation of digital news media interventions and considers them alongside insights gained in earlier sections. The intention is to offer in-principle and practical guidance to those taking on the next phases of the project.

44. The overarching purpose, objectives, achievement outcomes, content and delivery of the workshops, discussed below, are being developed with the new Curriculum for Wales 2022 in mind. The historical material included in the workshop exercises concerns an empowering Welsh story that marked an important step on the road to universal suffrage in the UK. It is of local significance to the citizens we plan to reach, including future voters. The contemporary take on the Chartist story and the project's participatory approach to learning and teaching are well aligned with the purposes of the new curriculum, to foster 'ambitious capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives; enterprising creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work; ethical informed citizens of Wales and the world; and healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society' (Addysg Cymru Education Wales, 2020.12).

45. While critical of the structural coherence of the New Welsh Curriculum, Gatley (2020.209-210) acknowledges that interventions of the type OCH envisages can play a role in contributing to both the achievement of the Purposes and the Areas of Learning and Experience. Workshops will clearly contribute to the achievement of the third purpose, to foster 'ethical informed citizens of Wales and the world' and to the cross curricular responsibilities of literacy, numeracy and digital competence. The main Area of Learning and Experience on which the workshops will focus is Languages, Literacy and Communication. Through that area participants will also explore aspects of Expressive Arts; Health and Well-being, Humanities; and Science and Technology.

Title of the project

46. Settling on a name for the project took time; for a while *Fighting Fake News* was the favoured option. Two key factors precipitated the change to the current title. First, initial

forays into the literature raised questions (see paragraphs 18-22) about the value of 'fake news' as a core concept. On balance, this report recommends that the *Fight for Facts* project embrace the term, recognising that its contemporary ubiquity, salience and currency has significant potential value in capturing the initial interest of prospective beneficiaries of the project. The limitations of 'fake news' as an overarching concept can be acknowledged and explored with participants as an integral part of the educational process. Second, the positive orientation towards the civic, adopted by several advocates of digital news media interventions, prompted a shift from fighting against something negative (fake news) to fighting for something positive (facts), while retaining the brevity and alliteration of the original title. OCH recognises that we have decided to replace one slippery, contested concept with another but has chosen to stand alongside the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals whose anti-fake news campaign is known simply as '*Facts matter'*.

Overarching purpose of the Fight for Facts workshops

47. There is general consensus in the academic literature that digital media literacy interventions are an effective means of inoculating people against fake news by helping them discriminate between trustworthy and untrustworthy information (Hameleers, 2020; Lewandowsky et al, 2017; Lim and Tan, 2020; Mihailidis, 2018b; Mihailidis and Viotty, 2017; Pennycook and Rand, 2019; Potter, 2010; Rasi and Ruokamo, 2019; Rasi et al, 2020; Wineberg et al, 2016). This positive evaluation validates the purpose of the *Fight for Facts* project, which is to empower voters (including future voters) to discern and challenge fake news, through the provision of digital media literacy workshops.

48. Building on Aufderheide's seminal definition of media literacy (1993), articles and reports written over the last five years make it clear that the acquisition of a set of digital media literacy skills cannot be regarded as an end in itself. For example, the purpose of the Children's Charter on Fake News (National Literacy Trust, 2018.6) is to 'empower young people' by effecting change in five areas that include and extend beyond the individual in the classroom: acquisition of critical literacy skills; the right to access trustworthy news; opportunities to practise their skills in real-world digital environments; understanding about news production to inform critical thinking; and encouragement to discuss news at home and with peers.

49. Several authors argue that, if digital media literacy interventions are to help counteract the threat that fake news poses to democracy, they must be intentionally civic in design and purpose. This could take some or all of the following forms: exploring ways in which media can be used to reform communities and creating sustainable pathways for positive social impact (Mihailidis, 2018b.154); focusing on the actions citizens take to use media to fulfil their needs as individuals and members of society (Eggert, 2018); promoting pro-active digital citizenship (Farmer, 2018); fostering critical citizenship, unlocking potential and stimulating creativity; and enabling citizens to become both thoughtful consumers and producers of information (Van Passel, 2018) as well as involved participants in the world, online and offline (Jolls, 2018).

50. This report recommends that *Fight for Facts* review its overarching purpose to align itself more explicitly with OCH's charitable purpose and its commitment to promoting and defending Article 21 of the UDHR (see paragraph 1). Although the adoption of an

intentionally civic overarching purpose, with associated objectives, will make it more challenging to articulate SMART achievement outcomes at both workshop and programme levels, the exercise will help to ensure that *Fight for Facts* makes a rigorous and authentic attempt to measure what is valuable rather than opting to value only what is readily measurable.

Guiding principles of media literacy education

51. The expansion of the scope of digital media literacy interventions, from a narrow focus on the individual as learner, consumer of news and user of digital media to the socially connected, civically orientated, active and ethically responsible citizen, features to a greater or lesser extent in all of the frameworks for digital media literacy interventions found in the literature reviewed. Farmer (2018), for example, refers to the six core principles of media literacy education identified by The National Association for Media Literacy Education: active enquiry into and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create; inclusion of all media within scope of concept of media literacy; building and reinforcement of lifelong skills; development of informed, reflective and engaged participants as essential for a democratic society; recognition of media as part of culture and agents of socialisation; affirmation that people use their individual skills, beliefs and experiences to construct their own meanings from media messages (NAMLE 2007). Paying particular attention to 'development of civic engagement', Farmer (*ibid)* advocates a four-stage, developmental, educational process leading to pro-active digital citizenship: awareness of the significant impact of the quality of information, for good or ill: connection with media from a digital citizen perspective, through experience and analysis of the content's connotations and societal implications; manipulating information as creators rather than consumers of information; and application of all this learning through civic action in the public realm, acting as a responsible digital citizen.

52. This process could easily be mapped on to Hobbs' (2010) essential competencies of digital and media literacy, cited by Mihailidis (2018a.154). This sequenced list comprises: access, the ability to identify and use media and technology skilfully and appropriately; analyse and evaluate, the ability to use critical thinking with socio-political awareness; create, the ability self-confidently to generate well crafted content tailored to its target audience; reflect, the ability to be rigorously self-critical; and act, the ability to work individually and collaboratively, in a variety of settings and 'participate as a member of a community at local, regional, national and international levels'. Mihailidis (*ibid*) enriches and broadens Hobbs' process-orientated competencies within a Civic Media Literacies Framework, predicated on the values of caring, critical consciousness, persistence and emancipation. This report recommends that *Fight for Facts* consider these frameworks with a view to articulating its own core principles, values and competences to inform the design, delivery and evaluation of the workshops.

Workshop objectives

53. Two of the questions about digital media literacy interventions, raised by Mihailidis (2018b), could helpfully be recast as high-level objectives to which workshops would contribute: 'How can we equip these citizens to be agents of social change as well as competent users of media?'; and 'How do we build experiences where humans work together in support of a common good?' In keeping with his emphasis on interventions that are intentionally civic, Mihailidis insists that the starting point for interventions should not be critiques of 'media texts, platforms or modalities' but the broader question of 'how media can support civic outcomes that bring people together in support of a common goal (Mihailidis, 2018a.162). The case is well made but there is also good educational sense in meeting participants at the point of departure they have identified for themselves and facilitating the next stages of their journey. Ideally, the curriculum should be designed so that the processes of becoming competent users of media and agents of social change seamlessly complement and reinforce each other. Jussi Tovianen, Chief Communications Officer for the Prime Minister's Office captures this potential in his description of Finland's programme of digital media literacy for all citizens:

> 'Even quite young children can grasp this, they love being detectives. If you also get them questioning real-life journalists and politicians about what matters to them, run mock debates and real school elections, ask them to write accurate and fake reports on them … democracy, and the threats to it, start to mean something. (Guardian, 2020)

Workshop achievement outcomes

54. To contribute to fulfilling these objectives, workshop achievement outcomes will need to reflect the technical, cognitive and interpersonal skills that participants will be able to demonstrate; the knowledge and understanding they will be able to bring to bear upon their experiences as consumers and producers within digital media environments; and the attributes that will characterise them in their roles as responsible, informed active citizens. There is broad agreement in the literature about the first two categories of achievement outcomes (see paragraphs 51-2 above). Jolls (2018) is particularly helpful in elaborating on the third and perhaps most elusive category. She characterises the media literate citizen as a competent information manager, an effective media producer, a wise consumer and someone who is an involved participant in the world, online and offline. These roles and the qualities attached to them are ideally accompanied by the following outcomes of media literacy pedagogy: a frame of mind distinguished by scepticism and a questioning approach, together with the ability to manage risk and transfer skills across all curriculum areas.

Workshop content and delivery

55. In order to ensure that the digital media literacy workshops contribute to the empowerment of voters, it is recommended that *Fight for Facts* engage participants in transformational learning through the co-creation of opportunities to challenge fake news in ways that promote and defend Article 21 of the UDHR, fostering responsible active citizenship and protecting democracy. In pursuit of this educational aim, the design and delivery of the workshops should be informed by consideration of the following

interconnected contextual factors: the strengths and limitations of research in the field, with a particular focus on demographic differences in susceptibility to fake news; and characteristics of the prevailing digital media ecology in relation to pertinent aspects of mainstream media and the emerging socio-political and economic context (see paragraphs 28-42 above). In such a rapidly changing environment, it would be wise to regard all findings as provisional and worth testing further through practice in the field.

56. Over the last five years, in response to the fake news crisis, a range of organisations in several different countries have developed resources, toolkits and training opportunities. It is recommended that *Fight for Facts* experiment with these as part of the process of designing and delivering pilot workshops and training-the-trainer sessions. For example, the *Newseum Media Literacy Booster Pack* (Lessenski, 2018) provides free access to usable and adaptable resources on key topics such as: evaluating information; filtering out fake news; separating facts and opinion; recognising bias; detecting propaganda; uncovering how news is made; spotting errors in the news; and taking charge of the role of consumer and contributor. Other US-based organisations share Newseum's commitment to combining digital news media skills acquisition with the promotion of active citizenship, including The Engagement Lab @Emerson College, which has developed the *Emerging Citizens* toolkit (2019) and Educating for American Democracy, which has recently published its *Roadmap* (2021) and is now offering an online educator workshop series. Most interventions focus on experiential learning, including an opportunity to create news (Lim and Tan, 2020) and closer to home, the National Literacy Trust provides free online resources that emphasise encouraging young people to gain practical experience of responsible news creation to demystify how news is made.

57. In light of previous discussions about approaches to learning and teaching (see paragraphs 24 and 53) it is recommended that *Fight for Facts* adopt a tailored, person-/group-/community-centred approach to digital media literacy interventions, differentiated by such factors as lifespan stage, roles, culture and learning needs (Rasi et al, 2020) which would allow participants to identify as a starting point those manifestations of untrustworthy information they wish to address and the modalities they feel comfortable about using for communication with others. Careful consideration should also be given to supporting learning with peer or other appropriate mentors.

58. There are, however, risks attached to the delivery of digital media literacy interventions, some of which have been hinted at earlier. If no effort is made to mitigate these risks, the *Fight for Facts* workshops may backfire and even make matters worse. Authors of the articles reviewed for this paper draw attention to several limitations of their research that may provide pertinent warnings to the designers of the workshops. In some cases, studies have been conducted in laboratory-type conditions in which participants have been alerted to the study's focus on distinguishing between trustworthy and untrustworthy information and/or where questions have been phrased carefully to excise references to pre-existing beliefs, partisanship, political ideology or feelings (Pennycook and Rand, 2019: see paragraph 33). The behaviour that participants exhibit within the 'laboratory' setting may be very different from their behaviour when they encounter fake news outside it and the same may be true of the workshop environment. In other cases, researchers have analysed sets of big data, such as the sharing of fake news posts on Facebook or Twitter (Guess et al, 2019; Lazer et al, 2018) without being able to access vital contextual information about the nature of the newsfeed that individual subjects

were receiving contemporaneously from multiple other sources, or even whether shared items were ever read by the recipient (see paragraphs 29 and 41). If 'third person effect' is added to the mix (Corbu et al, 2020: see paragraph 30), it is conceivable that *Fight for Facts* workshops could appear successful without ever challenging the blindspots we all have about our susceptibility to fake news and could reinforce our tendency to overestimate our own resilience to fake news and underestimate the resilience of close and distant others.

59. Jolls (2018) suggests that a media literacy pedagogy should foster a sceptical and questioning frame of mind (see paragraph 54). There is a danger, however, that interventions may lead to increased cynicism rather than a healthy scepticism, if they are mishandled, and to participants losing trust in authentic as well as fake news sources (Hameleers, 2020). Several aggravating factors are identified in the literature. For example, interventions may inadvertently promote a fault-finding approach, under the guise of balanced critical enquiry, by over-emphasising the identification of ways in which media distort, manipulate and slant information. Furthermore, interventions often adopt a transactional model, geared towards skills acquisition by the individual learner, which can place an unsupportable burden of responsibility on the participant and obfuscate the need for collective action among communities of interest, big tech companies and governments. This can result in increased distrust, polarisation and self-segregation, all factors likely to exacerbate the individual's susceptibility to fake news (Buckingham, 2017). Closely associated with this issue is the tendency of digital media literacy interventions still to focus almost exclusively on the critical analysis of content by the individual student, as if citizens collectively do not need to get to grips with the ways in which algorithms, platforms and targeted information flows have radically altered the media landscape for us all (Mihailidis, 2018a).

Workshop assessment and evaluation

60. In light of this radical shift, Mihailidis (2018b) suggests an equally radical change to the way that media literacy interventions are evaluated. He advocates that the current focus on comparing skills, knowledge and attitudes before and after a formal media literacy pedagogical intervention be replaced by an assessment of the impact the intervention has had in the real world. The proposal is challenging but flawed in several respects: first, it offers an either/choice without considering the option of a both/and approach, which seems more promising; second, and flowing from the first point, it fails to distinguish between the evaluation of a particular intervention by participants and the evaluation of a programme of interventions by a range of stakeholders; third it proposes replacing data that is easily specified, gathered and analysed (albeit limited in value), with data that is notoriously difficult to specify, gather and analyse (though arguably of much greater import). That said, the evaluation criteria OCH provided to The People's Postcode Trust could be seen as similarly challenging and flawed. The first criterion, that 'a diverse range of participants will benefit from workshops tailored to their learning needs' can be met by the sort of 'before and after' evaluation Mihailidis proposes abandoning, though what constitutes a 'diverse range' and how 'learning needs' are identified will have to be specified.
61. The other two criteria are high level and aspirational, like Mihailidis' proposed replacement but nevertheless capable of being operationalised and calibrated. In respect

of the second criterion, that 'Newport will make a valuable contribution to promoting and defending Article 21 of the UDHR by educating citizens in ways that can be replicated across Wales and the UK', the emphasis needs to be placed on the final clause, which specifies the means by which the criterion will be met. The design of the programme of interventions will need to be predicated on a framework of fully articulated principles and values, that can be replicated and re-interpreted in other local contexts, some of which have already been identified. There are some hostages to fortune in the final criterion, that 'high levels of public interest in OCH's work will be reignited and our dedicated volunteer teams will be revitalised amid the challenges of Covid 19' but initial interest in the project has been immensely encouraging, volunteers are keen to get back to work and steps are already being taken to establish the baseline data against which we can measure our achievement in relation to those intentionally aspirational and inspirational words.

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