

Put truth first in news reporting and information-sharing in general

By Leigh Andrews

18 Oct 2018

Media outlets are clearing their throats, pulling up their socks and clarifying their editorial policies following the '*Sunday Times* fake news fallout'. Here's what you can do, even if you're not affiliated with mainstream media.



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There's been a lot of reflection in the media space this week, since the *Sunday Times* broke the story that it will be returning all awards and prize money received for three now-discredited reports - on the Cato Manor police unit dubbed as a 'death squad', the Sars 'rogue unit' and Zimbabwean 'renditions'.



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The South African National Editors' Forum or Sanef is not taking the issue lightly. It regularly reminds journalists to [uphold the highest standards of ethics](#) as prescribed in the Press Code, and to report without fear or favour.

After all, that's the mark of a free and fair press.

Most recently, [EWN reports](#) that Sanef has commissioned an investigation into editorial integrity, following a meeting with the Tiso Blackstar management following the *Sunday Times*' false reporting scandal.

[News24](#) reports that while Sanef applauds the publication's management for owning up to what it calls "serious editorial lapses," the inaccurate reports have had a devastating impact:

“ Breaches of editorial standards have undermined public trust spreading beyond the publication itself, undermining the credibility of journalism for the public good. ”

This as the [Mail & Guardian Online](#) reports that more damage is expected in the 'Sunday Times fake news fallout', reporting that Sanef's executive director Kate Skinner had told the *Mail & Guardian* Sanef wants to strengthen ethics within the industry, specifically within the areas of training and support for journalists across the industry to ensure this does not happen again.



The Journalism Trust Initiative to combat disinformation is launched

4 Apr 2018



According to Skinner, this saga has highlighted the "tricky" political situations which journalists have to navigate.

A good call, given the current fake news climate.



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In an interview with Xolani Gwala on [CapeTalk](#), Sanef deputy chairperson Katy Katopodis added:

“ When I hear things like that, it is really like a dagger to my heart because as journalists our credibility and our integrity is the only thing we hold dear so if this is really the tip of the iceberg it will be a travesty for us as a country. ”

Sad, but true. It's on all of us to rebuild that trust in the media, whether we're part of the mainstream media set, publish to our own blogs or share news on social media.



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One of the best ways to ensure more factual reporting is to be held accountable for the results.

Dr Gleb Tsipursky, cofounder of the Pro-Truth Pledge project in the US, contacted me after my recent [article](#) addressing fake news, which he calls, “a topic that needs a lot more attention and clarification”.

Tsipursky shared that the Pro-Truth Pledge is one way of doing so.

12 tips to keep in mind when you share, honour and encourage truth

It's a project dedicated to clarifying the fuzzy concept of 'truth' and fighting misinformation and incivility through combining behavioural science with crowdsourcing, the Pro-Truth Pledge is focused on the following three pillars, which should be the basis of any media outlet:

Share truth

1. **Verify:** fact-check information to confirm it is true before accepting and sharing it
2. **Balance:** share the whole truth, even if some aspects do not support my opinion
3. **Cite:** share my sources so that others can verify my information
4. **Clarify:** distinguish between my opinion and the facts

Honour truth

5. **Acknowledge:** when others share true information, even when we disagree otherwise
6. **Re-evaluate:** if my information is challenged, retract it if I cannot verify it
7. **Defend:** others when they come under attack for sharing true information, even when we disagree otherwise
8. **Align:** my opinions and actions with true information

Encourage truth

9. **Fix:** ask people to retract information that reliable sources have disproved, even if they are my allies
10. **Educate:** compassionately inform those around me to stop using unreliable sources even if these sources support my opinion
11. **Defer:** recognise the opinions of experts as more likely to be accurate when the facts are disputed
12. **Celebrate:** those who retract incorrect statements and update their beliefs toward the truth

A worthy 'publishing ethics refresh' for all of us. [Click here](#) for more on the Pro-Truth Pledge, [here](#) for more on the global Journalism Trust Initiative, and [here](#) for a reminder of the South African Press Council's Code of ethics and conduct for South African print and online media.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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