

THESE days, almost everyone on a social network is a content creator or curator. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube users, among others, are constantly creating and sharing stories, pictures, videos and memes.

How many of us, however, think of ourselves as content creators and feel we bear any sort of responsibility to our “audience”?

Content creation boils down to the process of identifying a topic you want to share, deciding which form you want the content to take – blog post, video, Tweet, infographic, etc – then, producing it.

Anyone creating content should be adhering to some sort of standard when posting and sharing news.

Today, the global media is often accused of manipulating public opinion by spreading misinformation. One of the media’s biggest opponents, US President Donald Trump, has often attacked and belittled journalists by calling them “the enemy of the people”, “dishonest”, “corrupt”, “low life reporters”, “bad people”, “human scum” and “some of the worst human beings you’ll ever meet”, convincing his following that “the media” equates to “fake news”.

Fact check

While there’s no denying that some amount of social and political propaganda often makes its way into the media, and that advertising may influence content to some extent, it must be noted that content usually goes through a stringent process with numerous checks and balances in place – from ideation and planning, right up to production.

Most content creation processes involve thorough rounds of edits, often with other stakeholders, before content is ready for publishing.

According to Philip Golingai, news editor with a media group in Malaysia, reporters and editors make sure that the facts in every story are accurate and based on truth.

“We are taught to check for the five Ws and H – Who, What, When, Where, Why and How – and that each of these is accurate. We also ensure that reporting is fair, and that all sides of a story are told, so there is no bias.

“The risk of being sued for libel is a real one so we must always be vigilant,” he says.

Media organisations create and publish various forms of content in print and online on a daily basis – news and business reports, lifestyle features, sports updates, opinion pieces, infographics, videos, photographs and others, including comics strips.

For such frequent and large amount of content creation, checks and balances are crucial.

“When going through a story, seasoned reporters and editors have a built-in alarm bell which goes off to warn them when something is not right.

“They are trained to double-check all the facts. There are many layers of journalists who go through each story – from reporter to editor and then sub-editor. They comb the story for information or facts that they think might be fake,” shares Golingai, who feels that all content creators need to develop this trait in order to be alert to misinformation or false news.

“You need to cultivate your own ‘warning bell’ mechanism, so that when you read a story or get your hands on new information, you immediately know if something is off, too good to be true or too incredulous.

“You must also have a critical mind, and question everything. Ask yourself is that possible? Did it really happen? Is there proof?

“When sharing photographs and video clips, you must also scrutinise them carefully.

“For example, if there is a claim that a photograph of tourists stranded in a cable car is in Genting Highlands, look at the photograph closely to see whether you recognise any of the details.

“One must also check the source of the story, picture or video, and if this source is credible and reliable,” he says.

Online resources

Golingai says that for fact checking, there are several methods including contacting subject experts and double checking information on Google or social media.

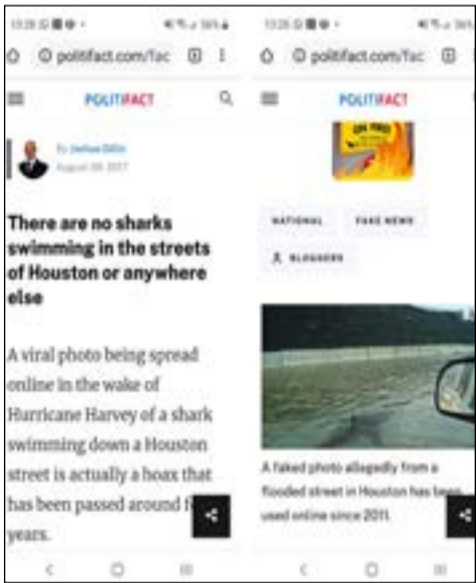
“Google reverse image is a great tool to check where and when a photograph is taken,” he says.

CREATE CONTENT WITH CARE

Verify all articles, posts and images before you create a story or pass it on



Nothing but the truth: Respectable news organisations ensure that only the truth is published, and the same responsibility applies to individuals who generate content on any social network or platform.



If you Google ‘sharks swimming in Houston’, Politifact’s post stating that this photo has been manipulated will pop up.

Google is indeed a quick and easy way to fact check information, articles, pictures and even audio footage. The multinational tech company goes the extra mile in ensuring checks and balances are available for all its users. You can go to Google’s Fact Check Explorer to verify anything you have a hunch is a conspiracy theory or hoax, the same way you would use a site like Snopes.com.

Sadly, sharing on social media often happens based on impulse rather than full analysis, according to Eamonn Kennedy, Storyful’s chief product officer.

“Anybody can share a story with thousands of people before they even finish reading what is being said. Bad actors know this and bet on people’s emotions. They’re willing to exploit the free reach of social platforms and pollute conversations with false facts

and narratives, including extremist content. For fact-checkers, that means any given conversation is vulnerable to lies and manipulation from anywhere in the world, at any time.”

When it comes to visuals, things get even more complicated. In a June report, Google’s group product manager for Search, Harris Cohen, said: “The power of visual media has its pitfalls – especially when there are questions surrounding the origin, authenticity or context of an image.

“Starting today, we are surfacing fact check information in Google Images globally to help people navigate these issues and make more informed judgments about what they see on the web. This builds on the fact check features in Search and News, which people come across billions of times per year.”

So now, when you search on Google Images, you may see a “Fact Check” label under the thumbnail image results. When you tap one of these results to view the image in a larger format, you’ll see a summary of the fact check that appears on the underlying webpage.

According to Google, there are eight times more social media users in Asia than in North America, and so the problem with fast-spreading misinformation is magnified in this region of the world.

Think of how many times you have received or forwarded a photo without knowing its source or accuracy. Viral images and memes flood our feeds and chats, and often they’re out-of-context or fake, according to a report by Irene Jay Liu, Google News Lab lead (APAC), in February, making it essential for one to check before posting.

“There are existing tools that Asian journalists can use to discover the origins and trustworthiness of news images, but they’re relatively old, inconsistent and for the most part only available on desktop,” Liu said.

“That’s a barrier for fact-checkers and journalists in countries where most people connect to the Internet on their mobile.”

Being on the forefront of innovation and

fact-checking, Google has developed a new prototype app called Source, powered by Storyful, which uses Google’s AI technology to give instant access to an image’s public history, allowing one to sort, analyse and understand its origins, including any manipulation. Source helps detect and translate text in images too, which is especially useful when cataloguing or analysing memes.

This is just one of the numerous resources Google offers to ensure that newsrooms and journalists have access to critical context about the information they encounter online.

On YouTube, Google redoubled its efforts to live up to its responsibility while preserving the power of an open platform by adhering to four principles: removing content that violates its policy; raising up authoritative voices; rewarding trusted creators and artists; and, reducing the spread of content that brushes up against its policy line.

Bringing things up to speed during the pandemic, Google allocated US\$6.5mil in funding to fact-checkers and nonprofits fighting misinformation around the world, with an immediate focus on coronavirus because health authorities had warned that an overabundance of information would make it harder for people to obtain reliable guidance about Covid-19, showing how invested it is in curbing the spread of fake news.

Freedom of speech is not freedom to lie

So, if you find yourself creating or sharing content, do take a page from these media practitioners and do the right thing.

Refrain from being led by your emotions and remember that freedom of speech doesn’t mean you have the freedom to lie or spread lies.

Be responsible, be accurate and critical, do your research, invest time and money in order to obtain interesting content, and make sure that only the truth gets out there.