

CREATE INSPIRING CONVERSATIONS

FINDING SOLUTIONS IN A BUSY SCHEDULE

Steffen Slot

Fellowship report

Constructive Institute 2022/23



Illustrations: Mette Stentoft

In short, the content of my report is the following:

Create Inspiring Conversations – the tiny book

A few add-ons with extra advice

How to greet AI in a world that is rapidly changing

The notice board of excellent findings – to inspire you!



Steffen Slot was a Fellow at the Constructive Institute, Aarhus, 2022/23, sponsored by Trygfonden. He works as a journalist at Frederiksborg Amts Avis/Sjællandske Medier doing daily news, interviews and investigative stories.

Dear reader

I came to Constructive Institute in August 2022 with the ambition of discovering new methods to enhance regional journalism, with a particular focus on the ability of journalism to bring problems closer to solutions.

In a summary, I described the ambition with these words:

- During his fellowship Steffen will examine how local media, across editorial offices widespread in a large geographic area, can design a workflow to strengthen the bonds between journalists and citizens as they work together to solve the problems of tomorrow. The ambition is to find a workflow that makes constructive journalism an offer hard to refuse for readers as well as fellow journalists.

In Aarhus the ambition met the fascinating discussions in the lounge at the Constructive Institute, study trips to San Francisco, London, and various locations in Denmark. Furthermore, my ambition aligned with the knowledge acquired through four courses at the University, culminating in the work presented here.

A section of my report comprises a slightly modified version of a tiny book, which is part of a series written by fellows at the Constructive Institute. In this book, I argue that successful constructive journalism requires a focus on four key elements: the power elite, engagement, storytelling, and trust.

Of course, I have gained far more knowledge and inspiration than the content of a tiny book. The tiny books were written as an easy way to get inspiration from the works of the fellows at Constructive Institute from August 2022 to June 2023.

I also had the opportunity to catch up with the latest discussions and knowledge about Artificial Intelligence and the way that AI can threaten the democratic conversation, and therefore I have added a second part to my report, which I call “How to greet AI in a world that is rapidly changing”.

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In my report, the tiny book 'Create Inspiring Conversations' is marked with a light blue background color. At the end of the book, I have included a few pages with additional advice on citizen engagement, storytelling, and the importance of thinking 'out of the box'.

My fellowship was sponsored by Trygffonden, and I express my gratitude to the foundation for its focus on regional media and recognition of journalists' close connection to citizens, who are often active in local society. Improving the democratic conversation is of utmost importance. To maintain my focus on these issues, I attended the courses 'Social Innovation,' 'The Political Elite,' 'Your Life Online – Identity, Politics & Conflict,' and 'Artificial Intelligence and Democracy: Friends or Foes?'

For 10 months, I resided in Aarhus during the week, spending weekends and holidays with my family in Græsted. I am deeply grateful to my exceptional wife, Inger, for her unwavering support. She has been an inspiring partner in conversations about journalism, often during early Saturday mornings over coffee.

One autumn day, I cannot recall the exact date, the words 'Conversations that inspire us!' were written on our small whiteboard in the kitchen. That encapsulates the essence of it all—inspiration and conversations.

Did I succeed in finding a workflow that makes constructive journalism an offer hard to refuse for both readers and fellow journalists? Well, it was a rather ambitious goal..

In short, I have narrowed down the highlights of my fellowship to four key factors for the success of constructive journalism:

- Be careful in selecting politicians, experts, and individuals with personal experiences. Ensure that they possess the power and knowledge to effect change, rather than simply expressing a desire to do so.
- Engage your readers or listeners in solving important problems.
- Experiment with storytelling, photos, and illustrations to compensate for the lack of sensation.
- Make the most of the trust you and your colleagues have built within municipalities.

In the following, you will find inspiration, and I will have achieved my goal if you feel compelled to comment on the ideas and suggestions, whether you agree or not.

During the spring, I came across an old concept: 'Learned ignorance.' As I understand it, it is about acquiring knowledge while acknowledging that one doesn't possess the exact answer. How truthful!

This report does not provide the definitive answer on how to practice constructive journalism in regional media. However, it contains valuable points. One thing I am certain of is that as journalists, we must embrace experimentation in the coming years to enhance the quality of our work and encourage more people to support journalism.

It is essential for journalism to be involved in the cultivation and harvesting of solutions, facilitated by journalists themselves.

Part 1:

CREATE INSPIRING CONVERSATIONS

FINDING SOLUTIONS IN A BUSY SCHEDULE

This part of my report is written for anyone who loves journalism's close contact with people's daily lives, knowledge, and ideas. It is for those who believe that citizens in a democracy need a place to meet and discuss - not a battlefield or a place for PR puffery, but a place for conversations that inspire us to create a better society. This book is especially for those of you who have noticed that journalism has taken a step back as the place where the power elite and citizens meet to get inspiration before making decisions.

We need to change that together, guided by citizens' questions and needs and our curiosity.

In journalistic themes, we should gather citizens, politicians, public servants, and experts to solve the problems in our everyday lives. This book aims to strengthen journalists' ability to facilitate such inspiring conversations. We can't use the method described here every day, but when we identify problems that are important to many people, we can accomplish more by focusing on four key areas: the power elite, engagement, storytelling, and trust.

A key point here is that when we - as journalists - investigate a problem, we have an extraordinary opportunity to gather a team of people who can work towards finding solutions. In local journalism we work closely with the citizens, hearing about their ways of solving problems. But there can be a tendency to work in silos defined by geography.

We fail to communicate that citizens in one town or region may have solved a problem that another community is struggling with. In our busy schedules, we often neglect to bring colleagues

from different editorial offices together, even though one may have excellent background knowledge and the other may have the sources to sharpen the story.

When we see these patterns, we should rally a group of journalists who can use their knowledge to delve further into a problem and invite a group of people to discuss solutions in several stories, a journalistic theme.

The group should consist of citizens, politicians, experts, and public servants who all promise to contribute their knowledge, ideas, and power to make decisions. The job of the journalists is to listen and guide the conversations towards solutions in what I call an interest-based fellowship.

This book aims to bridge the gap between high ambitions and reality by tapping into the knowledge and ideas of journalists working in the field. The method presented is an idea development tool that focuses on four key areas: the power elite, engagement, storytelling, and trust. This framework provides enough flexibility to accommodate various contexts.

Recently, the fellows at the Constructive Institute tested this method. I asked them to imagine working for a large regional news company, and that they as journalists had a specific interest in writing stories about men with postpartum depression.

The news company had previously covered the topic with a good case story, but the coverage had stalled after an expert provided wise but predictable comments.

Now the assignment was to reignite the journalistic theme by inspiring people to discuss solutions to postpartum depression while also adding value for new parents.

Within just 45 minutes, the fellows generated excellent ideas based on the four keys: the power elite, engagement, storytelling, and trust.



Invite power and knowledge in

Remember to call the one being criticised. Talk to a politician and get an expert to bring in perspective. Quite often that's the predictable for a not so good story. And then on to the next story!

After working as a journalist for two decades, it can be disheartening to see how often reality and the solutions proposed seem to be repeated. A colleague once pointed out that a story from last week was almost identical to a story from five years ago.

The problem in elderly care remained unsolved, and the proposed solutions were virtually the same. The only difference was the name of the politician involved.

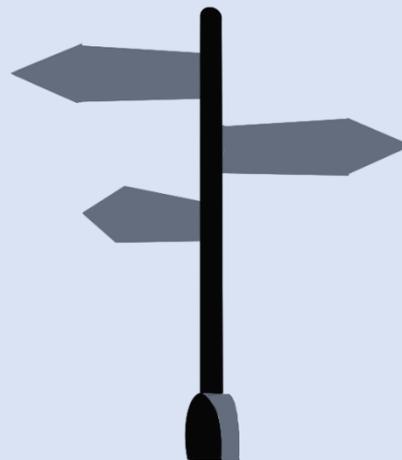
I have had the same experiences with my own stories, and this repetition is incredibly frustrating. I can't help but wonder if we as journalists need to be more discerning in selecting the people we turn to for solutions. Perhaps we should take a closer look at the real power dynamics at play.

Recently in Denmark, a report described the interaction between politicians, civic servants and journalists, and it frequently made use of the word "mistrust"ⁱ.

Amalie Trangbæk, an associate professor at Aarhus University, conducted her Ph.D research a few years ago interviewing and observing permanent secretaries. In her findings, she describes how public servants often view journalists' questions as disruptive, sometimes ruining their workday.

Let's just say, her findings do not suggest that the media is a source of inspiration for permanent secretaries or other decision-makers.ⁱⁱ.

The public sphere is often seen as a disruptive and polarizing place, except when there is a need to mobilise the people to gain attention. Quiet Politics seems to be the preferred approach for the power elite. As a result, the informational link between the people and the elite can be severed, thereby challenging the fundamental values of democracy.ⁱⁱⁱ.



To achieve our goal of fostering inspiring conversations and exploring solutions, it is crucial that we identify and invite influential people who have the power to effect change.

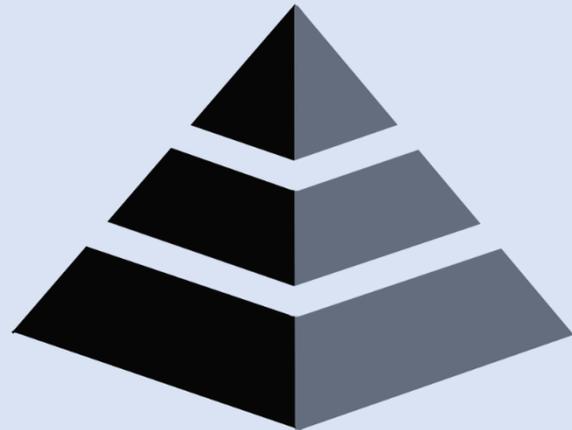
People who can bring curiosity, knowledge, and ideas to the conversation, whether it happens at a physical meeting or as dialogue in an article.

To identify the power elite, you can use these three methods^{iv}.

- The Positional Method: Who is in a leadership position with the power to take decisions, which have an impact on people's lives?

- The Decisional Method: Identify elites according to their active involvement in important policy decisions.

- The Reputational Method: The power to influence decisions can sometimes be difficult to discern. By simply asking people, you could get a different answer than using the two other methods. Who is considered to be of top influence?



Knowledge from experts and people's personal experiences are also types of power. So, don't forget to identify the people with the best academic knowledge. And don't forget to involve the people facing the problems that we investigate with our solution-oriented conversations.



For each problem, we'll need to gather the people with the power, the knowledge, and the experience. There is a fair chance that they will join because they are curious about what we can achieve together.

Engage your audience

There are many reasons to engage the audience in journalistic themes, but the most important is diversity. If we only rely on experts or public servants with the same perspectives, we may become stuck and fail to find novel solutions to complex problems.

Municipalities often invite local residents to participate in social innovations or urban planning. Several large reports describe the benefits and challenges of citizen engagement^v.

On the positive side, engagement can lead to:

- A better understanding of a problem.
- New, innovative solutions that go beyond conventional thinking.
- Assistance from citizens in gathering information.

However, there are a few things we need to keep in mind, such as:

- Who do we want to engage? Should we only engage the citizens we typically encounter or strive for greater diversity?
- Do we have the necessary resources? Poorly executed forms of engagement can cause harm in the long run.
- What is the precise purpose of engaging your audience?

It's often the quick, quirky ideas that generate involvement, identification, and smiles. For example, if we write about family life with children and postpartum depression, we might engage our audience by encouraging them to send pictures of their funny and tough experiences with children. Or, you can come up with other creative ideas when you talk about engaging the audience.

Taking it one step further, we can invite our audience to meetings where we act as hosts. In her book "The Art of Gathering," event maker Priya Parker explains how to bring people together in a meaningful way. Three pieces of advice stuck with me:

- The invitation is more important than you might think. Prepare your guests by letting them know what to expect, especially if you want them to answer specific questions.
- As a host, you can break the predictable social patterns where people tend to gravitate towards those they know. Guide your guests into new and inspiring conversations.
- It's okay to close the door for some people. You get to decide who to invite, and carefully selecting your guests can lead to sharper conversations.

Surprise your audience

Journalism that focuses on complex problems and nuances can sometimes be perceived as boring. Most people just want to enjoy life and make good decisions for themselves and their families. They don't like reality to be too blurry, difficult to navigate.

As journalists, we need to compensate for the lack of sensation in our constructive journalism by telling better stories. It should be an offer they can't refuse, despite all the confusing nuances.

To capture people's attention, we need to surprise them. Our stories should make people smile and ideally provoke a "Wow, I've never thought of it that way" reaction. There's no quick fix, but we can experiment to see what works best.

The obstacles we must overcome are well documented in several research papers based on the way we act on social media. We talk a lot about fake news. Why do we share it?

It's not just about algorithms or political agendas. When political scientists from Massachusetts analyzed 126,000 tweets with true and false stories, they found that false stories were retweeted quickly and widely by ordinary citizens. Further analysis showed that false news stories were connected to feelings like fear, disgust, and surprise - all of which have more impact than anticipation, joy, and trust - the reactions to true stories^{vi}.

Professor Michael Bang Petersen from Aarhus University looked into the evolutionary background for conflicts and lies, and he concludes that fake news and rumours are very efficient at coordinating attention and mobilising the in-group against the out-group in a situation of conflict^{vii}.

This might be the most important advice in this little book: we have to compensate for the lack of sensation, simplification, and conflict when we bring people together to find solutions. What's the use of inspiring conversations if too few people listen to them?

The illustrations in this book are one good example of how to do it. For my own part, I was recently inspired by a research paper about the way NGOs could get more support. The method was to tell short stories with a character, a plot, and causality to remind people of their important work^{viii}.

Maybe fact boxes should be less focused on facts and more focused on people describing in their own voice why a journalistic theme is important?

Trust – how to seed and harvest

To succeed in social innovation and citizen engagement, it is important to build trust. In the fuzzy front end of a project, trust can be as important as participatory design itself. It pays off for project leaders to spend time building trust. You can get people to vouch for you^{ix}.

I would argue that people may not trust journalists as a profession, but they trust journalists that they know personally – and journalists working in local media know a lot of people. We have a major advantage here, we have been building trust. Let's use it!

When we develop ideas for a journalistic theme, it's very important to realise how network of good colleagues can give us access to knowledge or vulnerable sources.

Okay, now we have a lot of people participating in our journalistic theme – all ready for a conversation that inspires us to find solutions.

- We have invited the power elite, knowledgeable and experienced individuals into our interest-based fellowship.
- We have engaged the audience in our theme.
- We have harvested trust to gain better knowledge.

Are we able to create inspiring conversations? Or will it be a predictable fight with arguments hurled from the usual trenches? If the trenches are too deep, fortunately, something can still be done.

In the polarised USA, researchers noticed that Republicans and Democrats were tired of the exaggerations and prejudices they faced when meeting each other. The tensions can be reduced by personal relations and knowledge of the legitimate reasons for holding opposing views^x. If you encounter people with strongly opposing, perhaps hostile positions: ask them about their definition of a perfect day and enjoy the short-term calming effect^{xi}.

In the book "The Enigma of Reason," its authors discuss why humans as individuals are generally really bad at reasoning. They argue that there are no evolutionary benefits from anticipating counterarguments. Your interlocutors will provide them, and if they stay silent, you'll get your way...

But your way is rarely the right way. Group discussion is typically beneficial when participants have different ideas and a common goal, the authors conclude.

So let's meet in...

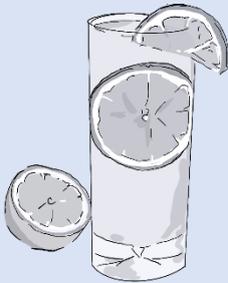
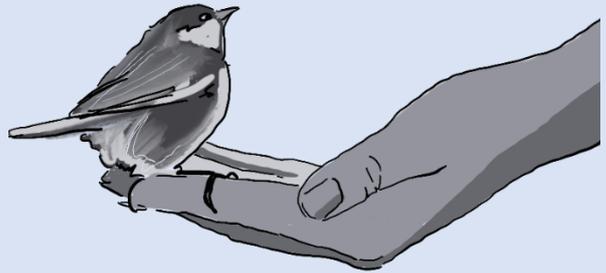
... inspiring conversations.

Yes, you're flying on empty...

When you begin focusing on the power elite, engagement, storytelling, and trust, you will – at best - fly on half-empty. If you ask your editor for two weeks to prepare, you'll probably get a 'no.'

But if you ask for a few hours to discuss how to create inspiring conversations on a specific topic, you should get a 'yes' - with the add-on that it's okay to produce less for a few weeks in order to do better.

You'll be an entrepreneur, with your own enthusiasm as the rocket fuel. When in trouble, follow Saras Sarasvathy and her principles of effectuation, which I have slightly changed to fit into journalism.



- Bird-in-Hand: Create the journalistic theme with the resources available here and now.
- Lemonade principle: Mistakes and surprises are inevitable. Use them to look for new opportunities and new points of view.
- Crazy Quilt: Don't be afraid of partnerships that can bring help, funding, and new directions. However, don't sell your independence.

Steffen Slot, Aarhus, June 2023

On the following pages: A few add-ons with extra advice

How to do citizens engagement and social innovation:

Yes, this 10 years old paper from an EU project is excellent!

Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum:

How a Treasure Hunt engages people and gives new ideas

Maybe a fact box should be a personal story?

A Framework for Crafting Short Stories to engage people

How to do citizens engagement and social innovation:

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“In the context of social innovation, the idea that citizen engagement is critical to the development and implementation of new solutions is often regarded as a self-evident truth. However, we argue that it is important to have realistic expectations about what citizen engagement can archive.”

I like the quote, and I agree.

When we talk about constructive journalism and democratic conversation, we often celebrate the idea of involving readers, listeners, citizens. We argue that their opinions and ideas are part of a solution to the problems we face. And indeed – it is a good idea to ask and involve our audience, but as journalists we have limited resources – we need to make sure that our efforts pay off.

Why not learn from the way that European institutions have worked with citizens engagement and social innovation for the past decades? The Tepsie-paper “Engaging Citizens in Social Innovation: A Short guide to the research for policy makers and practitioners” is a brilliant introduction – and you are most welcome to read the full 100 pages report, if this summary is too much of a summary.

Social Innovation are news solutions that simultaneously meet a social need, being more effective than existing solutions and with a better use of resources. It closely aligns with the common goal of constructive journalism: solutions. The participation and engagement of citizens are integral to both constructive journalism and social innovation, and there are valuable lessons to be learned from the Tepsie paper.

Let's begin by highlighting the obvious benefits:

- Providing information and resources: Citizens can contribute valuable information about their ideas, needs, and opinions, which is crucial at every stage of an innovation process or journalistic investigation. They may possess information about a problem that no centralized bureaucracy can ever obtain.
- Problem solving: Citizens with diverse backgrounds and perspectives can bring forth divergent thinking, which aids in finding innovative solutions to complex problems.

How can a journalistic theme profit from citizens engagement? Well, let's have a look:

- Crowdsourcing: If journalists are willing to go the extra mile and not only describe a problem but also delve into potential solutions, why not involve citizens in gathering the necessary

information? This approach, known as crowdsourcing, has been successful in projects such as "I Paid a Bribe," which exposed corruption in public services in India. Even small contributions can make a difference, and citizens are often willing to assist in the search for information. Of course, it's essential for journalists to ensure that the information obtained is of high quality.

- **Co-design:** Determining the best solution to a problem is highly context-dependent in social innovation. A solution that works well in one location may not be applicable when scaled up. However, involving local citizens in finding a solution can be effective for addressing local problems. The resulting solution can then serve as inspiration for others to learn from and potentially adopt parts of it.

Let's discuss the risks associated with citizen engagement, as outlined in the Tepsie report:

- **Co-option:** Be cautious of local elites who may exploit the engagement process to further their own interests rather than those of the broader local community.
- **Self-exclusion:** Citizen engagement often tends to be dominated by individuals with higher socio-economic status. Consider how to involve and engage those who are less educated, unemployed, and lacking influence in order to ensure inclusivity.
- **Legitimacy:** When you, as a journalist, facilitate a democratic conversation about problem-solving, it raises questions about who bears responsibility for the decision-making process. Is it the politicians, the citizens, or the news company? Keep this aspect in mind when engaging citizens.
- **Risk of disengagement:** Negative experiences of participation can lead people to disengage further, resulting in increased news avoidance and less democratic conversation. Avoid practicing poor forms of engagement that could contribute to disengagement.

Towards the end of the paper, the report offers some advice that is worth considering:

- **Clearly define your objectives for engaging citizens and identify what you aim to achieve through this activity.**
- **Determine which groups of citizens you want to engage and understand the dynamics within these groups.**
- **Assess whether you have the necessary resources to effectively facilitate citizen engagement. If resources are limited, it may be wise to adopt the "bird in hand" principle and avoid being overly ambitious with the available resources.**
- **Consider your ability to manage stakeholders' expectations effectively and be prepared to tolerate uncertainty in the outcomes of the engagement process.**

Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum:

How a Treasure Hunt engages people and gives new ideas



Who wants to be a billionaire Why are we captivated by the idea of a hidden treasure at the end of a rainbow? And why is Robert Louis Stevenson's "Treasure Island" still a beloved book, perhaps even more renowned as a musical?

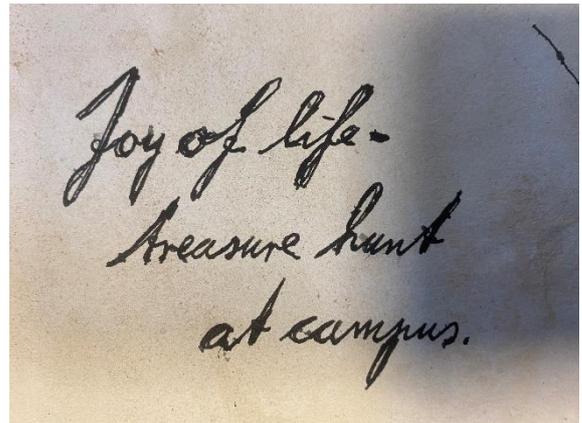
The allure of finding a treasure and the thrill of going on a treasure hunt have always fascinated us. Both children and adults find the idea of treasure hunting exhilarating. At the Constructive Institute, we assert that journalism should focus on solutions rather than just problems. We strive to discover best practices and seek inspiration for how to accomplish this effectively.

My fellowship has also been a kind of a treasure hunt, and out in reality we will face challenges. Nuances and solutions tend to be a bit more boring, so we need to experiment with new ways of telling the story and engaging the audience. And that's where a treasure hunt can play an important role.

In late March, I had the idea to gather information for a journalistic theme about "The Joy of Life." I wanted to explore what is important for a good life and identify the obstacles one may encounter along the way. To make the process engaging, I devised a treasure hunt concept.

I created a treasure map that highlighted five pieces of art, all located at Aarhus University during the 1960s or 1970s. Each artwork served as a clue leading to a sticker on the map. One of the stickers was a "game over" sticker, so participants had to choose carefully.

The six letters behind the stickers were the final clues – L U N E O G, creating the word "Lounge", our place to meet during the fellowship. In the lounge I had the treasure chest placed, and that part was just for fun. The most interesting part was the questions behind the stickers - the essential part of the treasure hunt.

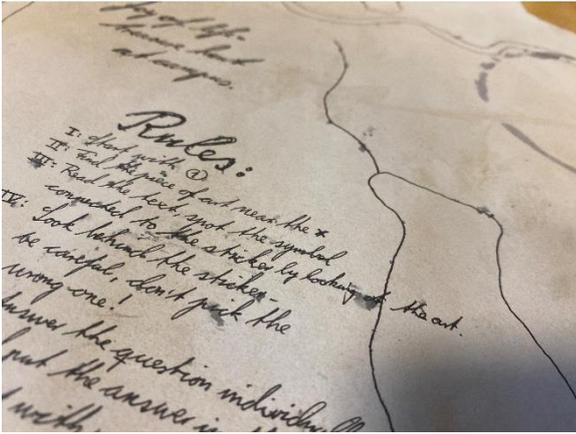


These are the questions I asked:

- What is the biggest obstacle for you in achieving greater joy in life?
- Which person knows the most about joy of life – and why?
- If you could invite a friendly quest from outer space, how would it look like – and what words should describe the quest?
- Write the name of a person who is good at cooking a tell why he or she is so special.
- Think of a nation that you create – your Utopia. What would be the most important rule in your constitution?

Fortunately, the participants were enthusiastic about the treasure hunt and willingly shared their answers to the questions. They wrote their responses on small notes and placed them in a designated box, which I later emptied and reviewed. In an quickly written email to the fellows, I explained the treasure hunt using the following words

"Treasure Hunt was about experimenting with information-gathering in a cost-effective and surprising way. Imagine I had to do a theme about "The joy of life" and designed a treasure hunt in fx The Royal Garden of Fredensborg Castle.



People could pick up a copy of a treasure map in the shops in Fredensborg and as part of the hunt they have to answer some questions, which they write down and put in a small box when they return for a cup of coffee.

The questions could be changed after a few months, as well as the concept/story in the hunt. We all need to do something together with our children/friends/family - I think that it could be popular.

After the Treasure Hunt on campus, I have emptied the box with your answers, and now I have quite a few ideas and perspectives on the subject "Joy of life". Hopefully you enjoyed some pieces of art that you would never have noticed without the treasure map!

So, thank you for an idea to a casestory from USA, a joyful mother of four kids. Thank you for pointing out that small children seem to be always happy (except from when they are crying... 😊)

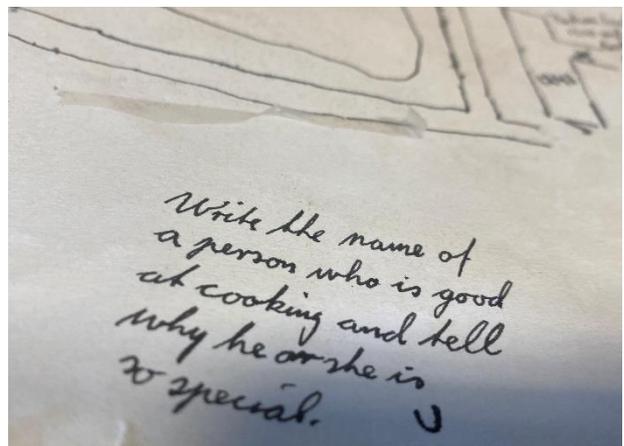
What is it about the song "Don't worry, be happy", and are there other songs about happiness and joy of life? And is it possible to understand Schopenhauer without having some "vino"? Most of you lack time and are burdened by the "Hamster Wheel" of obligation and money and of course ambitions! Which reminds me of a line in a song in Chess, The Musical, saying "Once I had dreams. Now they are ambitions"....

Michael Booth is of course the most famous "good at cooking" among the fellows, but with your help I could also do a story about the mum, mastering huge quantities, and the uncle Henrik and his "just great taste, nothing fancy look". And how does Sara manage to be a great listener and storyteller at the same time?

Actually, you made the illustrations to the theme with creatures from outer spaces, and you also wrote the constitution for the Utopia, if it should be founded by fellows from Constructive Institute:

§ 1 The first rule: You don't talk about fight club.

1. Don't fight each other.
2. Be kind and curious.
3. Don't be a jerk.



§2 Take the climate crisis seriously.

§3 Equality for the law. Respect each other no matter color, religion.

§4 Everybody should have equal access to delicious and healthy food.

§ 5 Follow the men who seek the truth – run from those who say they have found it.

§ 6 No hytteost/cottage cheese – my uncle always said that.

§ 7 Every 5 year everything must be re-invented or burnt to the ground.

Of course this is ambitious, but it could create value though the extra effort. I hope that I can find the time to make a treasure hunt and test it somewhere in “my hood”. So, if you happen to be wandering around the Royal Garden at Fredensborg Slot, pay close attention - you might suddenly hear someone singing, "Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!"

Maybe a fact box should be a personal story?

A Framework for Crafting Short Stories to engage people

FC Nordsjælland's players are subjected to both threats and racism. This comes after a season where FC Nordsjælland finished second in the Superliga.

The club has players from Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Ivory Coast, and Ghana.

Now, the club is taking action by filing police reports. Although the club doesn't want to go into detail about the content of the threats and racism, they emphasize that it is a serious matter.

It is an unfortunate cycle that rarely occurs when people meet face to face. Or maybe it does?

In a special feature, sn.dk sheds light on racism and threats in Danish football. Help us with your input.

When 12-year-old Peter wanted to play football again, he suggested to his father that they should drive from the village to the nearby larger city. His football teammate, Hassan, played there because he didn't quite feel at home in the small village club.

During the drive to the new club, Peter's father was very excited about how Peter would be received in the club, known for its diversity in the youth teams.

"I have never experienced such a warm welcome as newcomers on a football field," says Peter's father, who struck up a conversation with another father during training.

The previous weekend, the team won a match in another town, and when the boys celebrated a goal, they were subjected to racist comments.

"What do you say to the other parents if you experience something like that?" asks Peter's father. That's one of the things that sn.dk addresses in a feature about racism and threats in football. Help us with your input.

Which of these fact boxes do you like the most? During my course in "Social Innovation" I stumbled upon a text called "Transformative Stories: A Framework for Crafting Stories for Social Impact Organizations." In the summary the authors write:

"This transformative story construction framework outlines how Social Impact Organizations (SIO's) can assemble and craft authentic and effective stories that convey the organizations impact, engage audiences, and call those audiences to action".

Hmm, I thought. Maybe we can learn something? Journalists are good at writing long stories, but not that good at explaining why a story is important. We do it in a fact box, often very factual – and a bit boring.

In the paper about transformative stories, they write about stories as “a powerful yet simplified view that adds clarity and reduces complexity”. They define a story as “a detailed, character-based narration of a character’s struggles to overcome obstacles and reach an important goal”. “Thinking about the world through stories helps people organize and understand events and situations, as well as their own emotional responses to them”, they quote from a Bruner-text from 1990.

A very interesting section in the paper is about sharing stories about the severe, complex, or prejudicial realities related to a problem that a Social Impact Organization is engaged in.

“By avoiding difficult stories or failing to report unsuccessful outcomes, SIO’s may not provide their audiences with an accurate sense of the severity of a problem or the urgency of an issue. Because stories invoke empathic processing, they can be a critical tool for tackling taboo topics, stereotypes, and social stigma often associated with the people and issues SIOs serve.”

Civil servants and politicians can learn a lot from this section, hopefully being more honest in talking about a problem that is difficult to solve. Journalists can learn something about motivating people to read a story about complex problems and engage in a dialogue about possible solutions, especially because this part of the journalism is ambitious because of the lack of sensation as a driving force.

In the paper about transformative stories the recipe for such a story goes like this:

1. Explain the pressing social problems that motivate the organization to engage in actions.
2. Include a call to action.
3. Highlights the SIO’s accomplishments and achievements to demonstrate its value to the community.

To do this you’ll need to tell a story that gives the readers access to a character’s thoughts and feelings. It facilitates the audience’s ability to empathize with the character, thus adding depth, engagement, and persuasiveness to the story.

Sektion 1
Onsdag 7. juni 2023

Sporten 13

**FC Nordsjælland lyder
diversitet og har meldt
truede og racistiske
beskeder til politiet.
Diversiteten ses på dette
billede, hvor der står
FCN-spillere fra Sverige,
Danmark, Finland,
Eftembessysten og Ghana.
Foto: Claus Bech/Ritzau Scanpix**

**Tottenham
har fundet
ny træner**

Fodbold: Tottenham har tirsdag præsenteret australieren Ange Postecoglou som ny manager. Den 57-årige fodboldtræner er hentet til den engelske storklub fra et job i Celtic, som Postecoglou i den netop forgangne sæson førte til det skotske mesterskab og to pokaltitler. I London skal australieren forsøge at få Tottenham tilbage på ret kurs efter en sæson, der fik en kaotisk afslutning med flere udsåffninger på trænerbænken. Ange kommer en positiv mentalitet og en hurtig og angrebsvrig spillestil, siger Tottenham-formand Daniel Levy. Han har beviset, at han er god til at udvikle spillere, og så har han en god forståelse for forbindelsen til akademiet - alt hvad der er vigtigt for vores klub, fortsætter han. I marts sagde Tottenham farvel til italieneren Antonio Conte efter gensidig aftale. /ritzau/AFP

Har fået nok af racistiske beskeder

Fodbold: FC Nordsjællands spillere bliver udsat for både trusler og racisme. Nu sætter klubben foden ned med politianmeldelser.

Af Rudi Dalgaard
rudi.dalgaard@sfn.dk

Nok er nok for FC Nordsjælland. Efter en periode med en markant stigning i hadfulde, racistiske og truende beskeder til især klubbens afrikanske spillere, har FC Nordsjælland besluttet sig for at sætte foden ned med politianmeldelser.

- specielt i afslutningen - oplevet, at mængden af hadske, ondskabfulde beskeder er steget voldsomt. Og vi har også spillere, der har modtaget deciderede trusler, siger Trine Hesselund Hopp Møller, administrerende direktør i FC Nordsjælland.

hård og voldsom. Det ærger både direktøren og resten af klubben, at det er nået så vidt - og at konsekvensen kan blive, at man må lægge bånd på de udtalelser, klubben kommer med. - Det er klart, at flere får øjnene op for os, når der er sportslig succes, men det er

Et eksempel på drillerierne var, at FC Københavns målmand Kamil Grabara skrev en kommentar om Emiliano Marcondes' pandebånd på Twitter. Marcondes svarede igen ved at tilbyde Grabara et af sine pandebånd efter en kamp. - Det var jo sjovt at se

Det er bekymrende at se hvor få, der siger i mod, og hvor svært det kan være at ind i den slags dialog. Det er en ond spiral og en affærd, man sjældent ser, hvis folk snakker ansigt til ansigt.

Fylder i truppen
FC Nordsjælland ønsker ikke

The authors highlight the beneficial use of these elements:

- Characters
- Plot: Rising action/resolution
- Chronology
- Context depth/details
- Emotional engagement

From a constructive journalism perspective, there is an interesting argument in the research paper. As I have stated several times in my report, we need to compensate for the lack of sensation when doing constructive journalism. 'People want to understand the world around them to be able to make predictions. Therefore, people usually prefer clear answers and explanations over those that are vague and blurry,' the authors write in the article 'How Can Antisocial Outcomes be Prevented?'

This article, 'Transformative Stories: A Framework for Crafting Stories for Social Impact Organizations,' argues that a 'narrative imbalance can provide tension between story elements, such as actions that fail to achieve goals (e.g., a homeless shelter's unsuccessful attempts to help a woman living under a bridge).' The authors argue that unexpected twists and turns keep people interested in the story. They argue that the straight path from problem to solution would lower the audience's interest.

In other words, the journalistic stories might be a bit boring because of the nuances and complexity of the subject. However, if we, as journalists, can explain why the stories and the path to a solution are important in an emotionally engaging way, using characters and side-tracks, we can increase the impact of our stories. Maybe... Well, let's discuss it in conversations that inspire us. In other words...

He had just recovered from a cold, sitting at home in Græsted, writing an article with a deadline within a few hours. His wife came home from work, and he looked up from the computer, his blue eyes and short haircut resembling that of many men his age.

"I have been encouraged to apply for a fellowship at the Constructive Institute," he said, not using those exact words, but something close. "It's in Aarhus, and I'll have to stay there most of the time for 10 months. I think it would be better to apply in a few years because of the kids..." he hesitated.

She looked at him and said that it would be foolish to wait, considering how much he had talked about rethinking journalism and avoiding repetitive stories about problems, only scratching the surface.

14 months later, at the end of his fellowship, he was writing his final report, highlighting some of the things he had learned about constructive journalism. "It's not a straightforward and easy path – please share your comments and ideas after reading this report," he wrote.

How to greet AI in a world that is rapidly changing...

This chapter will highlight some of the situations where journalists must make decisions about the way they cover AI and its impact in society, state, and democracy.

“Technology is neutral; its application is not”.

It’s a quote from a background study published by Deutsche Bank in August 2019, and it was one of the first texts I read at professor Kees van Kersbergen spring course at Aarhus University in 2023. The professor called the course “Artificial Intelligence and Democracy: Friends or Foes?”, and it turned out to be a wonderful spring in the company of clever students, eager to discuss the possible impact that AI will have on democracy. And yes, we discussed, because the question is too difficult to answer with just one punchline.

It is without doubt that a new power elite is rising, and it’s not humans taking these powerful positions. Although the new elite have learned everything from humans, they are not.

We have given them their names – AI, ADM (Artificial Decision Making), machine learning and large language models, just to mention a few of them, and we tend to engage dialogue with them as they were humans. We are polite when asking ChatGPT to help us with a grammar check, and if we ask him more broadly to comment on a text, he is very enthusiastic and polite. How do you know it is a “he”, a female student from France was asked in a conversation, where she consistently talked about a chatbot as a “he”. Because the answers are often very, very stupid, she laughed...

So far in my report, I have been writing a lot about the power elite, engagement, storytelling and trust. The four keys are also connected to the rise of AI and ADM. Artificial Intelligence is already out there, and it will expand in various ways in the years to come.

It will be increasingly used in public institutions and the welfare state, which is under pressure due to the demographic development and lack of growth in productivity. There will be fewer young people to take care of the elderly, and AI will be asked to help public administration be more effective.

In this chapter I will highlight some of the key areas which we as journalists are obliged to keep an eye on. For each key area I will give a very brief summary of the most inspiring research articles, opinions and arguments that I have read during the spring semester about AI

But... What is AI? Let's ask ChatGPT to do a summary based on some lines from my notebook...

This is the result:

Artificial intelligence (AI) encompasses a wide range of powerful technologies propelled by computational power and drawing on methods like machine learning. It enables automated decision making and actions, leveraging algorithms to generate and analyze vast datasets. AI guides diverse hardware systems, from mobile phones and surveillance cameras to autonomous weapons, while also providing significant benefits in areas such as medical diagnosis, traffic control, and environmental protection. However, the increasing power of AI poses serious challenges and threats to fundamental rights and democratic societies. It is important to note that while AI algorithms are trained on dynamic datasets that can evolve over time, the influence of older data remains embedded within the algorithm even when the original data is no longer present.

You could do a book about all the nuances and with much more information about the history of AI and the differences between large language models and more classic AI but that's not the subject in this part of my report. My focus is on highlighting some of the challenges in using AI to make decisions or help make decisions in society, state and democracy.

7 reasons why journalism is needed to keep an eye on AI in society

Context remains as important as ever.

The technology in AI is not new, but the speed is the magical part. AI is excellent in a static world, analyzing huge datasets. But the world is not static – and it is difficult to trace how the recommendations made by AI is made. We refer to it as the black box. If an algorithm is trained on old data and then provided with new data, it requires significant resources to restart the algorithm and unlearn previous patterns. With machines in the loop, reality becomes recursive, and administrations must be prepared for that.

As journalists, our duty is to check if the soul of the machines reflects the reality in which we humans live.

Make sure that someone is responsible.

You ask the AI doctor for help. What if you get a bad advice? Who is responsible? What about artificial decision making in public administration? Politicians may argue that they are not accountable as they merely establish standards, but do they truly have control over the algorithms? “It is beyond the capacity of a human meaningfully to monitor the accuracy and quality of the systems output in real time”, Karen Yeung writes in an article about Algorithmic regulation.

As journalists, our duty is to ask who is responsible – and it should be individuals rather than, for example, a city council consisting of 27 politicians.

Discuss who owns the data and the know-how.

Private property rights safeguard the black box in algorithms, making it challenging for politicians to gain control over them. Once institutions have shared sensitive personal information with an algorithm, it becomes difficult to delete or ensure its complete erasure. What happens to the data? Who benefits from the information that can be extracted from it?

Once again – a quote from Karen Yeung: “Many of the concerns discussed ... are amplified in their seriousness and severity by the chronic asymmetry of power between those who design, own, and implement these algorithmic decision- making systems and have access to the voluminous and valuable data upon which they rely, and the individuals whose lives they affect.

Also, keep an eye on the research of Beth Noveck, continuously arguing that the state should be more innovative in securing in-house knowledge and ownership to systems providing Artificial Decision Making.

As journalists, our duty is to ask who owns the data and the know-how – and in addition ask what will happen if it is on a private ownership that decides to raise the prize of the AI-work?

How do we guard us against flaws in ADM?

We are aware that humans are prone to making mistakes, and we have established a systematic and effective institutional mechanism to mitigate flaws in human decision-making. However, when it comes to Automated Decision Making (ADM), we face a different set of challenges. Taking inspiration from a scandal in Holland, a key report from Amnesty International in 2021 can help us ask the important questions:

- Who developed the algorithm?
- Which dataset was used to train the algorithm?

- Have any identified risk points been addressed? (and what have been done about that?)
- Is there a plan for periodic evaluation?
- In the event of an error, will all affected users be informed?
- Can individuals file complaints or seek explanations for decision-making?

As journalists, our duty is to ask exactly these questions when necessary."

Does it bring in creativity and novel solutions?

“Political action and decision-making are geared toward constantly renegotiating a gap between the past and the future without being able to count on a secure foundation”. It’s a quote from a König and Wenzelburger article from 2022. “Algorithms therefore simply have no place in the process of realizing political decisions as setting the goals and values of a society”, they continue.

Of course, this is not necessarily true – AI can provide easy access to existing knowledge and offer inspiration based on available information. However, it relies on existing information that is combined in new ways. We have yet to witness pure imagination and creativity from AI. Democracy and politics is preparing for the unknown, as stated in another article.

As journalists, our duty is to ask the power elite: Which aspects of what you have expressed are your own ideas? Or are they all derived from AI tools?

Be aware of the platform power!

Have you ever been to San Francisco? It's a nice city, although its public transportation system leaves much to be desired. However, that doesn't seem to matter much because we have Uber. It's cheap for all of us, and the drivers appear to be content... although they are not very well-paid. A few years ago, politicians attempted to regulate Uber, but the company rallied all its users, explaining the potential impact on the cost of ordering an Uber, and the users began protesting. This is known as platform power.

We all enjoy the convenience of ordering affordable consumer goods from Amazon, primarily online. Yet, when we venture out, some of us lament the closed shops on our streets. This, too, is an example of platform power.

50 years ago we had another type of power – often industry threatening to move a factory to a city with lower city taxes. The difference is the global power of the big tech-companies.

The discussion about the data-driven economy is intertwined with this issue because we often pay with our personal data instead of money when using apps. It may feel great, but the question arises: Are we being deceived into paying more in the long run?

A powerful quote from Zuboff encapsulates this situation: "Surveillance capitalism is the puppet master that wields its influence through the vast capabilities of connected puppets, manipulating behavior rather than shaping souls.

As journalists, our duty is to ask if a decision is the best in the long term? Or is it based on the fear of platform power?

What about democracy? Any positive impact?

You can define a democracy in various ways. M. E. Warren has a problem-based approach to democratic theory. He argues that a democracy should be valued by its ability to:

- Empower inclusion
- Form collective agendas
- Have capacities to make collective decisions.

Please notice the important words: Inclusion, collective agendas, collective decisions. These principles emphasize the importance of involving as many people as possible in the decision-making process of a representative democracy and working together to address and solve societal problems. It is crucial not to take democracy for granted and to recognize the significance of these elements in maintaining a functioning democratic system.

As journalists, our duty is to ask whether this AI-tool contributes to democracy. The three keys can be used as inspiration.

Get rid of some prejudices about our online life:

The notice board of excellent findings – to inspire you!

Echo chambers, polarization, and conflicts online – all subjects high on the political agenda but also hard to navigate. Lecturers at Aarhus University have stopped talking about echo chambers in the same way as most politicians because echo chambers rarely exist. In reality, our online life is far more nuanced.

In the following, I have collected some of the research articles that have inspired me the most – all knowledge from the course 'Digital life online – politics, identity, and conflict.' They all contribute knowledge that can be used in journalism.

The key words describing each article are summaries of the abstracts or quotes from the abstracts of the articles, and some of the findings have been quoted in my tiny book 'Create Inspiring Conversations.' For my own part, I need this digital notice board to remind me of the key findings and points of view.

Why read this? Understand what happens when we interact outside our local bubble.

Törnberg P. 2022. "How digital media drive affective polarization through partisan sorting", *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 119(42), 1-11.

- The model presented in this paper thus brings an important shift in how to think of the role of media in politics, by essentially turning the echo chamber hypothesis on its head: it is not lack of exposure to competing ideas that lead to polarization but precisely that digital media brings us to interact outside of our local bubble.
- When individuals interact in clusters, the result tends to be local convergence, resulting in a stable plural patchwork of cross-cutting conflicts. However, when interaction takes place across space, the tendency is for groups to converge along the lines of partisan identity.

Why read this? Because it explains the value of helping people to act on a personal level.

Lüders, A., Jonas, E., Fritsche, I., Agroskin, D. (2016). Between the Lines of Us and Them: Identity Threat, Anxious Uncertainty, and Reactive In-Group Affirmation: How Can Antisocial Outcomes be Prevented?. In: McKeown, S., Haji, R., Ferguson, N. (eds) Understanding Peace and Conflict Through Social Identity Theory. Peace Psychology Book Series. Springer, Cham, 33-53.

- Thus, in sum it appears that self-esteem represents a vital buffer against threat-induced anxiety that helps individuals high in self-esteem cope with a threat faster and more effectively than their low self-esteem counterparts.
- Thus, even in unfavourable situations, highlighting potential benefits and including alternative aspects that might change the nature of threat may help prevent negative outcomes.

Research on the role of perceived control in the prevention of threat effects showed that reminding people of, at least partial, personal control over potentially threatening events, such as terrorism, or personal consequences of economic crises *prefer clear answers and explanations over those that are vague and blurry*”.

“People want to understand the world around them to be able to make predictions. Therefore people usually prefer clear answers and explanations over those that are vague and blurry”.

Why read this: Because we often blame the youth. There's no need to do that when talking about polarization.

Boxell L, Gentzkow M, Shapiro JM. 2017. Greater internet use is not associated with faster growth in political polarization among US demographic groups. PNAS 114(40):10612–17

- They combine eight previously proposed measures to construct an index of political polarization among US adults.
- We find that polarization has increased the most among the demographic groups least likely to use the Internet and social media.
- Their overall index and all but one of the individual measures show greater increases for those older than 65 than for those aged 18–39.

Why read this? Because some chaos-seekers want to rebuild society

Arceneaux K, Gravelle TB, Osmundsen M, Petersen MB., Reifler J, & Scotto TJ. 2021. "Some people just want to watch the world burn: the prevalence, psychology and politics of the 'Need for Chaos'", *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 376(20200147), 1-9.

- Some people may be motivated to seek out chaos because they want to rebuild society, while others enjoy destruction for its own sake.
- The article demonstrates that chaos-seekers are not a unified political group but a divergent set of malcontents.
- Multiple pathways can lead individuals to "want to watch the world burn".

"Summing up, it is important to recognize that the quest for status and recognition is deeply ingrained in human nature [23]. The finding that thwarted status-desires drive a Need for Chaos, which then activates support for political protest and violence, suggests that a Need for Chaos may be a key driver of societal change, both currently and historically."

"... one of the key challenges of contemporary societies is indeed to meet, recognize and, to the extent possible, alleviate the frustration of these individuals."

Why read this? You'll get inspiration to reduce polarization in discussions.

Mutz DC. 2002. "Cross-cutting social networks: Testing democratic theory in practice", *American Political Science Review*, 96(1), 111-126.

- In the polarised USA, researchers noticed that Republicans and Democrats were tired of the exaggerations and prejudices they faced when meeting each other. The tensions can be reduced by personal relations and knowledge of the legitimate reasons for holding opposing views.

Santoro, Erik, and David E. Broockman. "The Promise and Pitfalls of Cross-Partisan Conversations for Reducing Affective Polarization: Evidence from Randomized Experiments." *Science advances* 8.25 (2022)

- If you encounter people with strongly opposing, perhaps hostile positions: ask them about their definition of a perfect day and enjoy the short-term calming effect.

Why read this? Because you will get a better understanding of hostile political discussions.

Bor A, & Petersen MB. 2022. "The psychology of online political hostility: A comprehensive, cross-national test of the mismatch hypothesis", American Political Science Review, 116(1), 1-18.

- Hostile political discussions are the result of status-driven individuals who are drawn to politics and are equally hostile both online and offline.
- The authors offer initial evidence that online discussions feel more hostile, in part, because the behavior of such individuals is more visible online than offline.

Why read this? To understand the rise of power.

Cheng, J. T., Tracy, J. L., Foulsham, T., Kingstone, A., & Henrich, J. (2013). Two ways to the top: Evidence that dominance and prestige are distinct yet viable avenues to social rank and influence. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 104(1), 103–125

- You don't become part of the power elite by being nice. Dominance and Prestige are distinct yet viable strategies for ascending the social hierarchy, consistent with evolutionary theory.

Why read this? Because prejudices probably appear in many polarized discussions.

The Parties in Our Heads: Misperceptions about Party Composition and Their Consequences. Douglas J. Ahler, Florida State University Gaurav Sood, Washington, DC.

We document a large and consequential bias in how Americans perceive the major political parties: people tend to considerably overestimate the extent to which party supporters belong to party-stereotypical groups.

For instance, people think that 32% of Democrats are LGBT (vs. 6% in reality) and 38% of Republicans earn over \$250,000 per year (vs. 2% in reality).

When provided information about the out-party's actual composition, partisans come to see its supporters as less extreme and feel less socially distant from them.

Why read this? Understand how propaganda uses mainstream-media out of context.

Baugut, Philip and Katharina Neumann. 2020. "Online news media and propaganda influence on radicalized individuals: Findings from interviews with Islamist prisoners and former Islamists". *New Media & Society* 22(8): 1437–1461.

- They found that online propaganda and news media had interdependent influences on Islamists' rejections of non-Muslims and Western politics, as well as on their willingness to use violence and commit suicide.
- Cognitively radicalized individuals were influenced by propaganda that blamed non-Muslims for opposing Islam; this was reinforced by online mainstream news reports of right-wing populism and extremism that propagandists selectively distributed via social media.
- Among behaviorally radicalized individuals, exposure to propaganda and news reports depicting Muslim war victims contributed to the radicalized individuals' willingness to use violence.

Why read this? Get scared – because prison is not enough to suppress criticism.

Pan, Jennifer, and Alexandra A. Siegel. 2020. "How Saudi Crackdowns Fail to Silence Online Dissent." *American Political Science Review* 114 (1): 109–25 (16 sider).

- In this paper, the authors systematically examine the consequences of imprisoning well-known Saudis for online dissent by analyzing over 300 million tweets as well as detailed Google search data from 2010 to 2017 using automated text analysis and crowd-sourced human evaluation of content.
- They found that repression deterred imprisoned Saudis from continuing to dissent online. However, it did not suppress dissent overall. Twitter followers of the imprisoned Saudis engaged in more online dissent, including criticizing the ruling family and calling for regime change.

Why read this? Understand the nature of Chinese censorship 10 years ago and imagine the possibilities today.

King, Gary, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts. 2017. "How the Chinese Government Fabricates Social Media Posts for Strategic Distraction, Not Engaged Argument." *American Political Science Review* 111 (3): 484–501 (17 sider).

- They estimate that the government fabricates and posts about 448 million social media comments a year.
- In contrast to prior claims, they show that the Chinese regime's strategy is to avoid arguing with skeptics of the party and the government, and to not even discuss controversial issues.

King, Gary, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts. 2013. "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression." *American Political Science Review* 107 (2): 326–43 (sider).

- The censorship program is aimed at curtailing collective action by silencing comments that represent reinforce, or spur social mobilization, regardless of content.

Disclaimer: ChatGPT has been used to do British spelling and grammar check on this report, slightly changing and improving the language in most of the report. The tiny book-part has been edited with the help of fellows, only with very little help from ChatGPT.

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