

Re-Introducing MediaWell

January 31, 2023

While false or misleading information is a long-standing issue, contemporary networked technologies have amplified its scale and scope in recent years, posing challenges for achieving resilient information infrastructures, informed citizens, and sound democratic governance. To collect and synthesize research on mis- and disinformation and to present findings in an accessible way, in 2019 the Social Science Research Council launched MediaWell, an initiative that aggregates academic research on mis- and disinformation and helps bring crucial insights to non-academic audiences.

Now, in keeping with the fast-evolving nature of the academic disciplines that study it, we are expanding the thematic reach of MediaWell to encompass integrity in information systems. Our broader orientation reflects the fact that fact-checking, media literacy, and other technical fixes for the problem of false and misleading information are, at best, stopgaps for the larger questions of how to mitigate the influence of false, misleading, or hateful narratives, build resilient democratic institutions, and empower communities to inform themselves. As part of this work, we will look to translate academic research to spaces where it can be put to use: for journalists, policymakers, students, and the public who are interested in informing themselves about the problems that exist, and helping to work towards solutions.

As part of the Social Science Research Council's Media and Democracy program, MediaWell seeks to bring global visibility to different streams of scholarship on the evolving relationship between media, technology, and politics. We work to promote research and policy approaches that address the mis- and disinformation problem as an ongoing process of maintaining resilient information infrastructures, not as a crisis of confusion limited to atomized populations. In doing so, we will support research and outreach that deepens the historical, cultural, and political contexts for understanding mis- and disinformation, with a particular focus on how power structures dynamically shape information creation and flows. We will provide public access to this research so that it can inform public discussions of the next steps for fostering platform accountability, along with the design of media and community response systems that are resistant to capture from any one ideology or sector of society.

We seek to fortify a field of research and practice that points toward methods for cultivating resilience against false information through MediaWell's publications, scholarly network, and collections of scholarship. Our work will be structured around four core topics:

- **Contexts:** MediaWell first looks to situate the problems caused by false and misleading information within larger historical, cultural, and political frames that take into account how knowledge is created and who it is intended to serve, with particular attention to historical processes of racialization, colonization, and discrimination.
- **Politics:** We provide a forum for studying political dysfunction, and its bases in deceptive communication and propaganda, produced by organizations such as think tanks, interest groups, donor groups, commercial influence operators, political parties, and corporations.
- **Reconfigurations:** We address how data-driven technologies are changing public communications, privacy and surveillance, labor and work, and trust in political and social institutions.
- **Practices:** We provide a forum where researchers can discuss the methodological and ethical issues that arise from research in online spaces and work together toward finding solutions.

MediaWell has positioned itself to be a trusted resource for anyone looking to orient themselves in the field. Organized around a series of evolving [research topics](#), MediaWell maps a diverse and interdisciplinary field of research. Our [Research Reviews](#) provide in-depth analysis of the current literature on a variety of topics as well as top-level summaries for policymakers, civil society organizations, the media, and the public. MediaWell brings together leading scholars in the field to write articles and essay series, which offer high-level analysis, recommendations for policy changes, and new research directions. MediaWell aggregates news and research so users can dive into a topic; we maintain a [news](#) feed containing the latest news and reports about information systems, a [citations library](#), and [events](#) listings. We also feature a [scholar database](#) containing information about researchers and their work, so policymakers and journalists can know who can provide expertise on a topic of interest. As the project grows, we will debut new formats designed to better serve our core audiences.

MediaWell is a space for putting research to work in the effort to move our online worlds towards greater accountability and responsibility.