



Level Up Chat Transcript

Navigating the New Information Landscape – Resilience to Disinformation

Speakers

- Lizette Feris, 2017 Fellowship Alumna, Namibia
- Frank Senso, Director of Strategic Initiatives, GWU
- Eastina Taylor, 2018 Fellowship Alumna, Sierra Leone

Session Transcript

Lizette: Good morning, good afternoon, good evening from wherever you are joining us from. It is fantastic to have you here for this Level Up Chat, which is a preview of the content included in the new Mandela Washington Fellowship virtual course that will be launching next week Wednesday on the Fellowship Portal.

Lizette: The course is entitled “Navigating the New Information Landscape: Resilience to Disinformation. "I am your moderator Lizette Feris, 2017 Mandela Washington Fellow from Namibia, an ML practitioner, and I'm currently a project manager and trainer at DW Akademie here in Namibia working in Southern Africa, and we are very privileged to have such expertise with us today for our speakers. Let me introduce to you Eastina Marianne Taylor hailing from Sierra Leone. She is an experienced mentor, producer, and presenter with demonstrated professional experience in the broadcast media industry. Eastina is a 2018 Mandela Washington Fellow who completed her Leadership Institute at Indiana University. As a Community Engagement Officer and a Project Lead for On Our Radar in Sierra Leone, Eastina leads and mentors community reporters of up to 70 in her home country.

Also joining us from the [United] States is Frank Senso who serves as the Director of Strategic Initiatives at the George Washington University's School of Media and Public Affairs. Prior to this position, Frank led the school for 11 years as its director. He is an Emmy award-winning journalist and creator of Planet Forward, a multi-media storytelling platform that celebrates compelling narratives in sustainability and science. A happy welcome to Eastina and Frank, and I am so excited to exchange with you guys today.

Frank: Looking forward to it.

Eastina: Excited to be here.

Lizette: Fantastic. So just a reminder: although this is a public event, we will only accept questions from Mandela Washington Fellows. So, Fellows please post your questions in the chat, and we will



address them later during our live session. For now, let us get into the topic with our speakers Eastina and Frank. So, this is an open question to any one of you. How has the information landscape changed over the last decade, and why is mis- and disinformation appearing to be proliferated so much?

Frank: Eastina, you want to start with that?

Eastina: Oh. I would want to start. I thought you were going to, but I can start. Before we talk about the landscape, we need to understand the term. So, the time “information landscape” is used, it's a range of information used in our daily life, our work, our studies. And it's likely that your information landscape will reflect your interest and relate to different parts of your life. But now, if I am to talk about how this has changed over the years, I would say the information landscape is in constant state of change.

The internet has grown widely in reach and in capability today. We see residential connections with gigabytes speed and that was not the story ten years ago, so we are even talking about broadband internet, and this has become a norm in the developed world and all of it. Ten years ago, the cloud was an imagined buzzword but today it is essential for businesses to store their data and serve their customers as well. So, there are lots of changes that have happened, and handheld devices like the mobile phone have become rapidly advanced in capability. I remember my first phone. It was nice. I really loved that phone. I think that was in 2010, a smartphone that was in 2011. Yes, 2011/2012. I love that phone, but it was slow and not compared to what I have now. So, you see there are lots of things that have happened. And in 2007, Apple that we now see that's mostly used it was an imagined device, Nokia dominated. If you don't have a Nokia phone, I don't think you are that innovative. So that's how the landscape has changed.

But I would talk a bit about why mis- and disinformation appears to proliferate or all of the sorts. So, it's mainly to influence public opinion and to obscure the truth and because of that, we receive such an amount, a massive amount, of information as we used to 10 years ago. So, if you compare that, it means it would double the rate of misinformation, disinformation, or mal information that we receive. So, now more than ever, we are receiving more information than we used to, and the information that we receive mostly... there isn't much of any regulation or control, so we are all prone to receiving, but not only receiving, spreading either intentionally or unintentionally false information and disinformation. So, if we don't make it habits to cross-check, to check the reliability of information we receive or share, we would be intentionally or unintentionally sharing misinformation and disinformation.

And I will talk a bit about Africa because there are lots of things we can consider when it comes to Sub-Saharan Africa. You would know that they know most people, they tend not to because they're new to the internet. They're new to this sort of information. They tend to not be able to verify some of this information and these stories. And we must know that most of these verifiable this information they are not verified and verifiable. They don't have sources, and the languages that they use sometimes are deliberately provocative, and it leaves out pertinent details, and not only that, sometimes this information only presents one point and viewpoint. So, I think I would allow Frank to deliberate more, then I can go back and talk about it.

Frank: Well thank you, Eastina. And I completely agree with what you're saying. I might give it a little bit more than a 10-year scope, because I've been around for a while, and I've been very privileged to see some of these changes and shocked to see some of them. But when I first started in news, there were no cell phones at all, and there certainly wasn't a smartphone. I think the revolution that we have seen in phases, and we certainly have seen it over the last 10 years, boils down to this. Never before in human history, never before in human history, has so much information been available to so many people so fast. Holding hands with that never has so much disinformation been available to so many people so fast. And so we've got this swirl of content and information; this information leads to confusion, it leads to polarization, it leads to all the things that we have seen.

The really fantastic and amazing change that I've seen I joined CNN when it was a mere four years old, I joined CNN before the United States was cabled, before people had access or even thought that cable television, never mind 24 hours of news could be viable that anyone would watch. The revolution that we had, that we led, that I saw, that I experienced, that was so amazing, was a change of where a very few people at the very top of the information pyramid decided what everybody would see and hear and learn and when. And we brought pictures and news in real-time into people's homes directly, for the first time ever.

Bring on the internet, bring on the explosion of cable channels in this country and around the world, bring on social media, and what happens is we have a further disaggregation of the audience continues to break into little pieces, the audience tends to move because it now has the option to do so, toward media outlets that reaffirm or echo what they already think or believe, and, excuse me, social media comes along which gives individuals, in some cases, the same in some cases even more of an audience than a traditional news organization had.

In that change, in that revolution or series of revolutions, the big, big shift is one of them information going from the one and the powerful to the many because now it's the many to the many, and as part of that the loss of gatekeepers, sometimes responsible and really professional gatekeepers: editors, executive editors, managing editors, producers, executive producers, would say, "Eastina, I love that story, but where is your, who is your source? Go back, fix it, make it better. " Okay now somebody has a picture from their iPhone, or an opinion, or a conspiracy theory, there is no gatekeeper really.

They can put that up, and it competes, and the disinformation and the misinformation come from so many sources. People just sitting in the basement wanting to fill their time, somebody looking just to monetize those clicks, bad actors within a country or from another country were trying to just distract, destabilize, whatever the motivation may be. So, this is this very interesting, very challenging world, and so the changes I say that I've seen in the many years, and then certainly over the 10 years, is an amplification of all of this information, a further disaggregation of the audience into audiences, and these multiple sources of content - I'm not going to call it information because some of it is mis- and disinformation - that can align with people. And so, it is a very, very, very challenging environment.

Lizette: Definitely, I agree with you too. Eastina just before you take us off, I just wanted to mention that according to the UN, a 2010 report by their telecommunications union, they said that in 2010, Africa took the lead in moving from fixed phones to mobile phones. So, that definitely also sort of propelled us a lot faster into having these handheld devices by which we can now have internet access and so on. And I definitely agree also with Eastina, that there's a really lack of not enough skills to verify or even knowledge that we need to verify that not everything we see, read, and hear on social media is the truth. And this also happened like Frank said, when we moved from traditional media and having those systems in place. Journalists have ethics that they have to adhere to, that is why they have the gatekeepers. And so moving from that to an environment where everyone is a creator and disseminator of content, without having these gatekeepers, really sort of contributed to the plethora of dis- and misinformation, and general information disorder, so this chaotic supply of information that we see and so I definitely think that we have the knowledge now to definitely look at this, to break it down for the various audiences, Frank, and just see how they can each get this pertinent ML skills that they need to be able to navigate through this new information landscape. Eastina you wanted to add something.

Eastina: So, while Frank was just explaining, and I was just thinking, that we should remember that most of the information that we come across they are just nuggets of the truth. So, in our daily consumption, we should be careful, and we should take all the care that we have to, to make sure that we seek contextualized details because it's not an easy task to have this much information and be able to navigate properly. And as always, we should be on the lookout for stories that don't include verifiable facts and sources, because that's how you know that this information there's not some element of truth in it.

But I would say, even with verifiable facts, you must know that some of the stories and the languages used they are provocative, they leave some pertinent and important information, and that is affecting the way how we get this information, how we digest this information. And we have to be on our guard for opinions, for manipulative content, for other algorithm-driven misinformation on social media. And even when Frank talked about the gatekeepers, you would see that there are a lot of problems. When I started journalism a decade, over a decade ago, my editor would look at my script and say, "Eastina, you're rewriting the script over again, there is nothing I am going to use. " And I remember

me, sitting in the newsroom at 10 o'clock at night calling to verify my source and feeling disappointed in the morning because I don't have a verifiable source and my story can't be aired, can't be broadcasted. That's how gatekeepers were strong, but we are losing it, and it scares me it really does.

Frank: Well, I think this is exactly the point that you're both making, and it is part of what's changed and part of what we need to realize if we're going to really be resilient, and understand the problem, and deal with it. Where once, not very long ago, there were gatekeepers to that information, sometimes well-intentioned gatekeepers, sometimes bad intentioned gatekeepers, that's what we call propaganda right, but now the gatekeeping is on the shoulder of the consumer, the news consumer, not the news provider. Every one of us is a gatekeeper to our own information, and that puts a lot more burden on citizens.

I like to draw a parallel between our information diet and our food diet, right? We know what's good for us and what's not. We also know what tastes good and what's fun to eat, and they're not the same things. But we're responsible for that, each one of us is responsible for what we eat. Nobody is going to, we hope, force-feed us. And the same thing is true with information now; you have so many choices; the individual, the news consumer, has so many choices. So how do you understand what information is credible? How do you distinguish one content provider or news organization or media company from another? How do you see a social media post, or a blog, and figure out where did that come from? Does this person have an agenda? How do you take apart the quotes, or the facts, or the data that are offered in a particular piece of content as just an individual and say let me figure out whether this is actually true before I act upon it, or I share it before I like it, and amplify it even more? And so that shift in the gatekeeping is so interesting and so important.

Eastina: We should always try to recognize the means by which the information got to us. And also, there is this urge when you see an interesting, or something that you think is breaking news or something, make sure you check. If you're not sure, you have to ask questions. As Frank said, the responsibility is on us, the consumer. It wasn't like that 10 years ago. Like you trusted the news source, but now we are all in the business of fact-checking, and we should make sure that we resist the urge to share further without examining its source and make sure that it doesn't have potential biases. So, it's not only on social media, so I'm sure you'd feel like it's just social media, but it's not. It's about the registrations, who owns these radio stations and tv stations and newspapers, who own the traditional media because it determines the kind of information that will get to your feed, that will get to the airways, that you will be watching. So, we have to make sure that we will resist the urge of sharing without further examination.

Lizette: That's so great that you brought that up as seen as sort of media ownership and like Frank said, gatekeeping is now the owner of the consumer and that has shifted the paradigm. So, media ownership is very difficult sometimes to a certain on social media whereas with traditional media it's easy to find out who owns what and how that affects the message that we receive. But on social

media, it really is very difficult, and I'd like us to maybe mention a few other factors that contribute to the increase, especially focusing on Sub-Saharan Africa. For example, if you look at bots and trolls how a lot of people might not be aware of that and how you don't know who's behind that sometimes. Do you want to maybe elaborate on those factors?

Eastina: Well, I'll allow Frank to go first then I can add later on.

Frank: And so, your focus on this is you're interested in addressing what exactly?

Lizette: Robots and trolls that are usually anonymous. So, it's really difficult to ascertain the ownership who is behind the account and how do they contribute to information disorder?

Frank: So, I think that what we have to understand as news consumers as well as news producers, I think what we have to understand when we're trying to be resilient and figure out how we counter this problem is that this mis- and disinformation comes from a lot of different places, and our response is going to depend on where those come from. So, for example, if we know that the mis- and disinformation is coming from somebody who's sitting in a faraway place trying to monetize the clicks, the intent behind those clicks, the intent there, allows us to develop a strategy to counter them. The bots and the kind of algorithms that drive this are multipliers, vast and horrible multipliers, and they can anonymize the content so we don't know where it's coming from, they compound us relentlessly so that it's around the clock kind of thing, and they can be brilliant in micro-targeting where this stuff is going to.

You're a college student in an urban area in Sub-Saharan Africa studying agriculture and boom it can come right to you. You're a voter in the United States, and you're a minority voter in a contested Congressional district, and we've had this where anonymized mis- and disinformation actually comes to this population and tells them to vote on the wrong day. So, it actually confuses them as to when they should go and vote. So, this is where we're going to need to enlist, in a powerful way, the technology companies, the social media platforms, whose own algorithms enable this kind of thing. This is very hard to counter of the social media platforms, their size, the monopolistic power that they have, and their steadfast refusal to open themselves up to be truly transparent and that people who study this have access to the data so that we know where this is properly coming from and can stop it.

This is probably, to me anyway, the most frightening element here is the ability of bots and algorithms and things that don't even have direct human handprints on every transaction to multiply and to just proliferate in ways that are astonishing in their global reach.

Eastina: And sometimes worrying as well. So, the bots-and-trolls discussion, I would not say it's new in Sub-Saharan [Africa], but people know about it, but not as much people that use social media know about bots and trolls. Imagine a person who isn't well intentional, because only intentional is not the word I want to use, someone who is well intentional and knows what he wants to pass on a

propaganda message, he wants the person they use these things to get on to young people. So, in Africa, when there are situations around you would see lots of information around, and mostly these are from trolls, and these people they pass on this information which intend to cause, violence, to cause problems, so we have to be on the guard to make sure that we are able to identify that this is not from this is an attack, or this is really well focused on a particular set just as Frank was explaining. So, we have to be careful.

And when we talk about bots and trolls, I want to talk more about WhatsApp because apart from bots and trolls of all the other things, Lizette you know because you are an African and you live in a Sub-Saharan country, that WhatsApp has created this much opportunity for us. It has a future that is essential to our region because if you look at the literacy rates, you would understand that with the audio message feature, one can be able to send voice notes, without even writing, or without any assistance. Say someone from the village is running his farm or plantation but wants to buy something. You can easily send a voice note to your supplier, and they would understand exactly what you want. But I meet all of these immense benefits WhatsApp has brought to our continents, there is a battle. There is a battle to balance the need to protect privacy and then also fostering business, but also preventing the spread of false or hateful content on the app. So as much as we love WhatsApp in Sub-Saharan [Africa], we have as individuals, as a country, there are lots of upcoming issues that we will be facing in years to come.

But I think countries have started putting modalities in place in Africa and for any unforeseen or some consequences or breach of citizen's privacy. And I think individuals we should do that as well because as much as we want to enjoy the benefits, more and more people are turning to WhatsApp for news, they are turning to WhatsApp for trusted, like in a group they are turning to whatever to get information to spread information, and there are lots of spreading of image information on WhatsApp. The app is considerably being used for information disorder and the spread of disinformation/misinformation. It's often difficult to determine where a post originated from, especially if it has been forwarded many times. So, these are all of the risks that we are facing, or the things - the consequences - that we are going to face as the years move on, or in 10 years a decade.

Frank: I have a friend who started writing per sub-stack. I don't know if you know about substack, but substack is this platform here that allows people to write, and he's getting hundreds of thousands of views, and they're paying him serious money. He's doing very thoughtful, serious essays, they're opinion essays, it's not straight news. But one of the other challenges that is interesting, it's also an opportunity, is how there has been this proliferation of platforms whether it's WhatsApp as you say Eastina because WhatsApp is enormously influential and people are sharing all kinds of gatherings and whatever, and Instagram is the same sort of thing.

We for this Planet Forward project that I started, we did a series of these Instagram posts, they were short little 60-second, they were sort of infographics that were set to music and had some moving

graphics and things like that, and we had over a million views. So again, you come back to this massive amount of content and the great choices that people will have to select what they want and where they're going to go, but the gatekeeping they're going to have to do, because is it opinion, is it reporting, is it flat out wrong.

Lizette: There are so many aspects that we have to consider when we talk about our new information landscape or information ecosystem that we're navigating. And as Eastina said in the beginning, it's constantly changing, it's evolving, as is digital technology, as are the platforms that we consume, and it's up to us consumers to really be aware of those. And how do we safely navigate through them?

Let's move on to our questions from the audience, and we've got our first one. Can legislation be used to tackle disinformation without compromising freedom of speech, and what is an appropriate way to tackle mis- and disinformation? This is coming from a 2019 Fellow in Sierra Leone.

Frank: That's a really, really great question. It's a really tough one. The EU is moving at a different pace than the United States. Africa is moving at a different pace, country to country. The challenge with this is that the information infrastructure is global; laws are national, and regional, and often local. And so, we end up with a very difficult and culturally diverse patchwork of responses to this.

In the United States, this is fiercely difficult because of our First Amendment. And the way we translate our First Amendment, which leans very heavily toward free speech, it leans very heavily toward airing on the side of granting too much license, rather than shutting it down, this/our culture, as I think we've all seen, for good and for bad, is built around individual rights, and so the right of the individual in many cases supersedes the right of the community.

So, we're wrestling with this. But there's a lot of consideration about how the platform should be regulated, whether they should be held liable for damaging information that crosses through their pipeline, how that can be done, the platforms themselves as we know de-platform people if they have more than three strikes, but they also wrestle with this as we've just seen with Spotify where they've been trying to deal with this whole Joe Rogan controversy over being a super popular podcast host and hosting on his show people who come on and frankly spread mis- and disinformation about COVID-19 vaccines and other things.

The legislative regulatory route in the United States is going to be very very difficult because of First Amendment considerations. In Europe, for example, there's clearer legislation that's already on the books about hate speech where hate speech is banned, and we haven't got it as clear a legislative approach to that as we've got here, but it's something that's going to have to emerge from this space very importantly over the next, I'd like it to be quick, it won't be quick, but certainly over the next few years.

Eastina: Well, I agree it won't be quick, and in Sub-Saharan Africa, or Africa in general, I would say that it would be a hard thing. We know about the situation for a largest question, we know about the situation in Sierra Leone. If you talk about certain things on social media, you're free to talk and people just go there, they just say what they want and all of these things. I would say it will be a necessary step for like a commission to give some amount of regulation, but I know that freedom of speech will be affected.

So, in most African countries we have international and this commission like media commission or something IMC that regulates and complaints are taken to them, and now with the repeal of the criminal libel law, these are all things that would help to make sure that freedom of speech we were able to preserve it.

What I would say is I think they should, our country, people, and private companies like social media companies should spend money to make sure that they understand what it means to regulate, to control social media, not only going and taking the same laws that are used in traditional media. Because if you post something or you differ you defend somebody you would be taken to IMC in our states or our country you'll be taken to IMC you will be taken to court and all of these things but how does that apply to social media. So, it's very important that we start thinking about that and also i's sure as young people because I always talk and when I talk I think about the young people because as Frank says there are lots of things that needs to be done and done very fast but as young people we need to start having this conversation.

It starts with having a conversation and talking about how can social media be regulated and be controlled without affecting freedom of speech. We should start thinking about that. I cannot over emphasize that it's very important. And then how can we tackle this and disinformation? Well, as I always say, I would say that you have to make sure that all the information that you interact with you, especially information that you're going to post or something that you're going to share, you check you fact check, and you make sure that if you're not too sure if there is any doubt or there's anything that you see is contradicting. There are reliable information sources that we can go to and ask questions, but it's always important that we fact-check because the responsibility is on us. Up until we have regulation, up until we have a committee or commission that takes care of these things, we have to take up the responsibilities as individuals and as young people.

Frank: The legislation is really hard, it's a really hard space because how do you legislate, and you can do it, I mean there are ways, but how do you legislate and not make it illegal essentially to be wrong? People will say wrong things unintentionally. Are they going to be penalized for that? How do we not make it illegal to disagree or to even have an opinion that runs against conventional wisdom because conventional wisdom may change? You may have a situation, we've seen it with COVID-19 where the science has changed and the prevailing wisdom has changed, whether it's masks or other things, and

you don't want to have legislation in place, as some countries may already have, where just having an opposing opinion lands you in trouble or in jail.

I will tell you a quick story. I'm hosting a podcast series right now and we're doing a four-part series, four parts of it, on mis- and disinformation around COVID-19. I spoke to a woman the other day in pre-recording the segments who told the story of her father a 65-year-old man living in Arizona. He listened to the governor of the state, this was back in 2020 when the governor said well, we're pretty much past the worst of COVID-19 now. They thought it was going down, the governor was against masks and other things, and he said it was okay. And this gentleman, this 65-year-old, said I believe that I believe the governor. And the daughter said, well wait a minute we're not out of the woods yet, don't stop wearing your mask, don't do that. He said no this is the governor said it's okay I believe that. He went out to a bar. He went and did karaoke, and he got sick, and 19 days later or something like that he was dead. The daughter now blames the governor. So, do we legislate against somebody saying something like that and then who makes that determination? That is so complicated when you get into that level of thought.

Lizette: Right, and it's such a good example and question Frank that you're posing. Is a person who spreads this information liable at some point, especially when it has such severe consequences? I just want to mention that in Southern Africa at least the ARTICLE 19, a worldwide watchdog organization and champion for freedom of speech, has examined constitutions of the SADC member states, and they revealed that a lot of the SADC member states actually use the defamation of character laws when someone spreads false information about another person, especially on social media.

The African Commission on Human Rights and People's Rights stressed in its Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa that "states shall review all criminal restrictions on content to ensure that they serve a legitimate interest in a democratic society. " Because again we have the right to freedom of expression, and so information legislation with regards to defamation of character laws would then infringe on that. It's about who is the watchdog, and who for example should hold the governor accountable for the mis- and disinformation that he had spread at the end of the day that had severe consequences? There are a lot of things that we need to think about.

In Lesotho, for example, in 2018, the constitutional court there found that criminalization of defamation of character has a chilling effect on journalistic freedom of expression and results and self-censorship by journalists and of course the public as well. These are some of the examples of where legislation has been used with regards to mis- and disinformation and how it definitely has a connection and infringement of freedom of speech. I just also want to get back to the appropriate way of tackling the mis- and disinformation. I think Eastina you already started with sharing some of how do we promote healthy information systems and especially for ourselves? I like your analogy, Frank, of eating healthy food versus accessing healthy information and staying healthily informed, but what would you say, what are some of the tips that we can still use to promote information that is

healthy for ourselves? And of course, us being the gatekeepers for our communities online, how do we navigate that, what can we do?

Eastina: Frank, you want to go first, or should I?

Frank: I'm happy to go first. How do we navigate that?

Well, let's come back to the food diet. We label things. We have an ongoing campaign. Governments, doctors, community organizations are part of that. This is what we need to do. We need to create a web of positive and solutions-oriented an ongoing conversation about our media literacy about our media diet. Where is it coming from? Is it labeled? Do you know the brand? Has it got a track record? Do you know who created it? Do you know what's behind it? We have to teach people to take what I refer to as healthy skepticism into all of these exchanges.

We also at the same time can look more institutionally and assert opportunity I think that exists in content providers, news organizations, and others, it's a fabulous branding opportunity for them, right? Trust us! We will assure your information health, and then they have to explain why, right. It's like, it's like the package that says "organic," and simply by using that word people may tend to trust it more. I do want to very quickly come back to the legislative issue too because this is part of this in the United States.

I should mention in our Communications Decency Act there's this thing called Section 230. This is very much up for grabs right now in this country, and I want to read to you Section 230 because it relates to the social media platforms and their role in responsibility right now. And right now, they are not legally responsible for what travels through their pipeline, and the language reads as follows, "No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider," which means that if I post on my social media platform the most outrageous stuff, that platform is not legally responsible for it.

Now there are all kinds of perils here if we make them responsible, legally responsible, for every piece of information that is uploaded or transmitted by hundreds, thousands, millions, billions of people perhaps. But it's no longer viable for a Spotify, or a Facebook, or a Twitter, or an Instagram to say oh we're just the pipeline, we have no responsibility for any of this. And legislatively as well as at a corporate level, we really are struggling with this, so those things go hand-in-hand.

Eastina: I think yes so as you just said I think it's really hard when we talk about legislation and all of it. I would talk about portion control. So, you have talked about the labeling, and you have to read and make sure that what you're responsible, but also in food or when we eat food if you want to lose

weight, or you want to maintain this balance weight, or a stable weight, you have to make sure you control the amount of thing that you eat.

So because the more you eat, the more you would add nutrients and sometimes these nutrients there are calories, there are different kinds of things that we don't need too much, so it's the same with information like health. So, my first and foremost thing that I would say is firstly we have to be careful, so we care before we share. As much as we are all content creators, the internet or this era has given us the power to create, giving us the power to distribute has given us the power to become editors ourselves, so we have to be careful: care before you share. And then another way that you can promote information health is to be thoughtful when sending information to others. Try to spare people with excessive exposure to information that does not support their current challenges. That is in the office space, because I know most times, we kind of give a whole booklet, or a whole document that's 24 pages, and that it's only two page that they're supposed to read, or that the information they need is in that two pages. Why not take that two page and send it, or just give them, say read between this and this.

Even in schools and universities, it's far worse in Africa. When you go to universities in Africa, you're giving up like a whole paragraph or a whole book to read the entire book, without even saying reading paragraphs this, and this, and this, making sure that you only be taking the information that you need. Then another thing I would say is be realistic about your intake capacity. How much can you take? So once you recognize that, just focus on a handful that is suitable for you. Only, I'm saying it very slow, only concentrate on the ones that are beneficial to you and your line of work.

I had serious issues when I transitioned from one job to another, and there were lots of information there, and I was struggling. I had the best boss I would say. and I had supported colleagues. but between my past work and my present work I struggled a lot. Frank, I really struggled. But what helped me was I started concentrating on the information, on a handful of information that is suitable for me at the moment and that is beneficial to the work I'm doing at the moment. Every other thing can be dealt with or can be read later, can be understood later. Then also to prevent ourselves from burnout and being unproductive, because information overload makes you very unproductive. You pay attention to what is required, and I would say with all of my heart, you cross-check all the bits of information you interact with and look for some trusted source, ask trusted people.

We have like trusted journalists in Africa around the world and most times they are open to like say, if you ask them, this and this information I saw this and I saw that and I think I just thought I should ask. I'm sure by doing that it's varying they would say oh no that's not true, there are some beats of facts, verifiable facts in it but this has some intention in it, and you have to be careful with it. So we have to make sure that we check sites. So as much as we know that there are lots of misinformation/disinformation, but there are trusted sources of sites that post trusted information, and there are other things that we can do as well.

Frank: I love it; I love what you're saying. It's so practical and useful.

Lizette: Definitely, and it still goes along with the analogy of being a healthy human whether it's the food you eat, exercises you do, water consumption. It applies the same to the information you consume to verify and make sure that it is what you need, so I always say rather go for quality of information rather than quantity. And this is what Eastina also alluded to, that we need to know what makes up quality information for me to be able to identify it.

For example, I found that [unintelligible] my algorithms a little bit puts me in a better place to be able to one: receive verified sources mostly, but I also have the fun and the entertainment. When I engage on these verified, so traditional media, I have a lot of them on my social media feeds, that's where I get my different opinions. So I make sure that I'm not in a filter bubble or an echo chamber, and I engaged with people who have different opinions than I have. I find that on those platforms somehow you do feel protected because there is eyes watching over what is going on the traditional media's new pages. At the end of the day, you are able to on that platform also educate people and when they become cyber bullying-ish when they start attacking you and your personality and the way you look, I can quickly stand up for myself and say no dude let's debate the issue not the person. And I found that very helpful over the years that I have seen a change in the type of communication that we have with the people that I interact with and how they respond to me as well. So, there's very interesting that we first become aware we get the education and the skills that we need and build this healthy system around us. Frank, maybe you can start us off, so how do you think we do this with children? The younger generations are usually digital natives.ves. In our line of work and in the media sector and so it's a bit easier, but what do you think we do with children when it comes to information health?

Frank: We start really early. We don't give them this [holding iPhone to the camera] at 18 months old and let them go off on their own, and we bring some discipline. And we teach them to ask questions, we teach them to ask the right questions. Where does this information come from? How do we know it's true? What other sources are there? Are there other places where we can do this? We put it for children in the form of a story. Children know stories, and we tell them stories.

Well just like there's a Big Bad Wolf, there's Big Bad Information out there. And we can reward them. When my kids were young, I used to have this little game, this is back in the in the olden days when we had newspapers, remember what a newspaper was right, and I would reward them each week if they would find two or three stories that were on the front page of the newspaper, and we would just talk about it over a meal. So, we need to engage with our children, we need to understand that just as we teach them how it is safe to cross the street, or the food that is healthy for them, we will teach them where does information come from, how do we know we can trust it, how does that information get built.

We're in a way now we're all and this is weird but it's true it's just as I say that the paradigm has shifted, we used to have gatekeepers and now we're all our own gatekeepers we have to teach our children how to be gatekeepers, which means we as parents need to know how to be gatekeepers first. And I think that means as news consumers because we have to understand this before we can teach it we have to bring healthy skepticism, healthy skepticism, to all the information we consume. We have to really try to understand as I said a couple of key questions if it's just a few. Where is this coming from? What is the source of the information that's being reflected here? And very importantly like a scientist can I replicate this? Can I find this somewhere else, or is this one outlier? If it's an outlier, it's going to be hard to find it someplace else or if you find it someplace else and it's just driven by ideology, it's driven by opinion, can I corroborate that somewhere outside of that community? So, how do I determine what's real and the information I can trust and how do I teach that to my children?

Eastina: So, it's a constant fight and a battle for me. So, I have two teens like teenagers, and we all know the situation. So, my nephew and niece, they are teenagers 14 and 17, that's how they'll return this year and I have-

Frank: You're right in the middle of all of this.

Eastina: Yes, and I have a preteen my son is going to be 10 and I have a young child who just wants to hold a tablet and constantly. So, what we do is firstly it's you know don't allow them to be overexposed as well. And then when you're giving phones to your teenagers, make sure you download like Family Link, and you monitor what they download. If you ask our neighbors, they would hear the sound of our voice when we take the phone away from our teenagers when they download something that I just got the notification, I just got the notification, and I saw you downloading Snapchat, what are you doing there? It's not for you. I am restricting the phone for a week, and if I see that you are posting something, I am restricting the phone. I'm also explaining to you why I'm taking the phone away, and I'm grateful to my partner for that because he's more of the tech person, and he's always constantly monitoring when he's in the provinces even when he travels, he's constantly monitoring that. And I know that my teenagers would not like me or love us for that, but they would understand that in the future. So, we have to, but first, as consumers, we have to be able to be gatekeepers as Frank said and fact check so that we will teach the younger generation how to fact check. Otherwise, it's a problem for this generation as Lizette called them. Lizette, how did you call them? I had forgotten.

Lizette: Digital natives. They are born with it; all the people are migrants. I'm sorry Eastina, I just wanted to add in children's rights, we would ask you then as a parent where's the child's privacy? but before we go into that.

We have eight minutes left and so just a final shout out to the Fellows that are watching us on Facebook Live to please if you have an urgent question pop it in there for us. We can still discuss it for over the next couple of minutes. But in the meantime, maybe we can start with the final thoughts from our panelists. You know, just sort of final remarks from your side when it comes to our new information landscape, it comes to distant misinformation, we covered so many topics as well as information health. How do you want to wrap that up? What is my one takeaway that you want to leave me with?

Frank: One takeaway, wow. That's ambitious though good for you. You know, as I was listening to Eastina talking about being a parent. I have three kids they're grown now, in fact, they're now having children, and I'm thinking oh boy you got your hands full because I remember when we had our kids, we had one computer in the house it was easy to monitor. It was in a public place, I could go in and I could check, and I did the history so I could see what they were visiting, and I knew what I was up against. And now it's so difficult, because kids have access to smartphones, and tablets, and things, and in some ways maybe this is a really good lesson for us, at all ages. Because we need to be, as I said earlier, our own managing editors of the information that we consume. That's the first and most important realization and takeaway that I would share.

We can't, it's not good enough, to blame social media, to blame this bad actor, to blame I mean yes, we need to do that, and we need to ratchet up what they do we need to change legislation we need to do that, but it will never change the simple fact that this paradigm has changed. Information is more available to everybody than it's ever been before, and each individual bears responsibility. So, what does that mean?

It means we need to understand what constitutes credible information and where that comes from. We need to understand what is the difference between the standards of a recognized news organization and a random blogger. We need to understand what governments, or NGOs, or corporations, or people with self-interest are going to try to communicate and how they're doing that. We need to be able to go into an article or into a blog and look at it with this healthy skepticism and pull out those bits that we need to fact check ourselves, just literally copy, paste it into a google search, and see what comes up; you'll you can see where that connects.

It's unrealistic to think that everybody is going to be a private detective of every piece of information. People don't have that kind of time or interest, it's just not reasonable. But through the work that you're doing in your lives, that I'm doing and teaching, that we're doing through media, that governments and others are doing, and that gets tricky. We need to encourage people to be thoughtful and informed consumers of information, and that extends to how we teach our children. And that's very very tricky, but it is absolutely vital, I am convinced because there's no one solution that's going to come top-down and solve this problem. That's just not going to happen.

Lizette: Yep. We're going to be our own heroes on this.

Eastina: Yes definitely. And in Sub-Saharan Africa, I would remind you again, I think I've said this over and over again. We mostly are gullible to information we interact with, and as much as this has given us the power to create to thousands and distribute to thousands of people, we must remember there's lots of information that doesn't meet the standard of journalism, and there are lots of people who present opinion as facts. We must always be on the lookout for that. Worst of all, people should be gatekeepers. They should make sure that every information they're interacting with they look at with a critical eye, they put on their critical minds to interact with this information. Because there is lots of misleading content to frame an issue or an individual, there are lots of headlines or captions that don't support actual content, or sometimes they are genuine information and imagery, but they are with the aim of manipulating and deceiving people.

So, in Sub-Saharan Africa, there are lots of copy and pasting, there are lots of clicking and sharing of content with the emergence of bloggers, our YouTubers, the social media influencers, and all of that are so-called experts in the region. But be careful. Make sure that you always are on the lookout, because we are in charge of the information we interact with. We are in charge of how much we use that information and how far, and as much as we are sending that information to so many thousands of people, but we should take care that we don't share something that is misleading, intentionally or unintentionally.

Lizette: Right, and also know how to debunk fake news. When you come across an article you verified it for yourself, share it with other people and say don't believe this. I think one of the most prominent examples that we face in SADC are the fishing sites links that are shared via WhatsApp. I mean I get one at least once a day from some group or someone. It's so clear that the URL that they're saying will win a million dollars, is not the same as the company that's giving you the million dollars. So many people don't even look at that, and I think some part has to do with our reading culture as a whole that we just read the headline, we read the first part. Win a million, and I want to share it with my friends and my family, without double-checking, without clicking through on the link, and seeing where you end up at the end of the day before you share this content. I think that's my one takeaway from both of you, that I'm in charge of the information I receive and that I share, and the duty is on me, as a responsible citizen, as a responsible user of social media, to be able to navigate safely and further extend that to my network that I have whether it's within traditional media or social media. I think those are some of the critical things that we need to take forward.

As we end the session, I just want to remind you of course first thank our panelists thank you so much and those who are watching us for making this event a huge success. It was really enlightening and awesome to engage with you. The course "Navigating the New Information Landscape: Resilience and Disinformation," will be live on Canvas on Wednesday, February 23rd for the Fellowship Alumni. Don't miss this. Make time to get the knowledge, the skills, the reflective attitude that we need to navigate



safely and responsibly through the information ecosystem that we have today. With that, I'd like to say thank you so very much and goodbye.

Frank: Thank you.

Eastina: Thank you.

Frank: See you both.