

## Librarians and journalists of the world unite!

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Librarians and journalists have much common ground and both find themselves fighting on several fronts in a disrupted information world. As someone with a first degree in journalism and a Masters in information management it has long struck me how many similarities there are between the two professions, whose primary focus is to inform and educate society. It begs the question “Why don’t library, information professionals and journalists work closer together?” The communities share common values and goals, with the library profession structuring and helping others navigate masses of information safely whilst the journalist conveys information on common and accessible platforms. It is obviously not always the case as agendas, especially within the media, dictate how news is served. Yet there are a few things the library community can do to refine and improve how research is written about.



I attended the one (and so far only) ‘This is not a fake conference!’ which took place at London South Bank University in June last year. The conference was established as a platform for information professionals to focus on that hot topic within the information literacy world. Presentations were delivered on work to help students and academics tell the difference between Russian Bots and credible online information. In attendance was a Reuters’ journalist who was working with academics on a fake news research project. In hindsight there should have been more journalists present and I suggested that future conferences opened their doors to more writers. There are no plans to run a follow-up conference in London or elsewhere. Given its success, it seems a shame for the community not to take this forward beyond a Jiscmail LIS-FAKENEWS mailing list.

There are several established conferences and seminars that explore information literacy and media reporting in their respective professions, but a yearly unified event or collection of workshops and seminars would reap rewards. Such an event would go beyond how we explore digital literacy in everyday life and work and actually look at how librarians and journalists can collaborate more in the field of science communication. Journalists and the larger media organisations have their own agendas, so enticing the health columnist from The Daily Mail might be highly optimistic, but surely it’s worth a try?

What is the focus of the scholarly communications lifecycle when we talk about misreporting and fake news of scholarly outputs? Perhaps we should highlight the words transparency, identity and traceability. The media are far from perfect when they communicate research but how much of that is actually their fault? The health or science reporter for the BBC or The Press Association may be aware of open access publications and the importance of citation; they may also understand how statistics should be presented in a news story. But what about the remainder of the journalism

community, from international media down to local news and blogs? Do they understand how research is published and communicated? More to the point, do they care?

There are a few reasons why getting scholarly communications right in this area really matters. Firstly that it is a journalist's civic and professional responsibility to report the facts fully and in a short article that is restricted by word count, so linking to the research is crucial. This is made harder when journalists neglect to cite open access research. Instead we see news stories with no links to the research but instead paid for adverts and the practice of churnalism and, even worse, yellow journalism. Beyond a missing citation, news stories can neglect to mention and link the academics involved, the department and institutions behind the work; not only that but the funder can fail to get a mention. When research is communicated shouldn't the reader know who has funded this work and shouldn't the funder know they have been mentioned in the media.

Sadly there will always be the problem of fake news as writers, commentators and organisations peddle their own agendas, angles and cherry pick stats that make the most attention-grabbing front page. It's quite unlikely that an organisation like Fox News would ever cite a piece of research unless it confirmed their own organisational and owner bias. Yet there are plenty of newsrooms and journalists at all levels who would be receptive to the idea of better understanding research outputs and how to cite them if the scholarly communications community reached out to them.

Where does the scholarly communications professional come into this? Whilst most organisations' news outputs are supported by media and communication teams, there is more libraries can do to be active in this process. Media teams are often reliant on academics to inform them of a new piece of newsworthy research. Scholarly communications team are likely to see most outputs pass through their systems at the point of publication, especially as part of the REF exercise. They may not be in a position to identify whether a piece of research is newsworthy but they will often spot notable academics and high profile work passing through their publications system in addition to noting previous media coverage. Over time patterns of interest become more visible, especially utilising Altmetrics. Scholarly communication professionals also know which the notable publications are which could indicate an impactful piece of work.

A more cohesive scholarly communications ecosystem that works close with communicators and journalists would benefit society as it would help foster greater transparency within the media. The library community has long worked to help academics improve their online identity, whether that is through having an ORCID or applying DOIs to their outputs. Traceability means the academic community, publishers and funders discover where their research travels across the world, how it is being received and whether this generates impact.

More conferences like the one that took place in London last year can help collaboration between different professions that will benefit of everyone. Scholarly communication professionals can learn from journalists and help identify how best to ensure notable research reaches the media team sooner and eventually a newsdesk, whilst journalists would benefit greatly from understanding research outputs better, in particular the publishing process and how to properly link works and authors. Many journalists will have been to university, but if they left after taking an undergraduate degree it's quite unlikely they will have much understanding of the changing research ecosystem in 2019.

Journalists, like librarians, are busy but they are increasingly under threat as a profession. Newspaper sales are down, libraries are closing, but we need both experts more than ever. There is scope for close working between these two groups as there is strength in numbers and a shared desire for truth and knowledge by those unfettered by bias and conflicts of interest. There is much to be gained by an annual event that brings the two groups together in the same room to see how they can work for the greater good and help ensure everyone gets the best quality societal information. Whether that is through workshops, seminars or a yearly conference, fake news and churnalism won't go away but we can work together to push it onto page two of a Google search page.

These views are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of UKSG.



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