

## 33 Problems With Media In One Chart

### Description

**USA: One of the hallmarks of democratic society is a healthy, free-flowing media ecosystem.**

In times past, that media ecosystem would include various mass media outlets, from newspapers to cable TV networks. Today, the internet and social media platforms have greatly expanded the scope and reach of communication within society.

Of course, **journalism** plays a key role within that ecosystem. High quality journalism and the unprecedented transparency of social media keeps power structures in check—and sometimes, these forces can drive genuine societal change. Reporters bring us news from the front lines of conflict, and uncover hard truths through investigative journalism.

That said, as Visual Capitalist's Nick Routley and Carmen Ang detail below, **these positive impacts are sometimes overshadowed by harmful practices and negative externalities occurring in the media ecosystem.**

The graphic above is an attempt to catalog problems within the media ecosystem as a basis for discussion. Many of the problems are easy to understand once they're identified. However, in some cases, there is an interplay between these issues that is worth digging into. Below are a few of those instances.

# 33 PROBLEMS WITH MEDIA

VERSION 1.0

Most of society uses mass media and social platforms to communicate and stay informed.

Despite all the benefits we receive when information flows freely, there are a number of broken systems and negative externalities as well. Acknowledging these shortcomings is the first step to solving them. Below, we identify 33 problems in the media ecosystem.



## Tabloidization

Enhanced focus on entertainment and the lives of celebrities, and more superficial coverage of current events.

Lurid coverage of the personal lives of public figures takes resources and attention away from more meaningful reporting.



## Filter bubbles

Highly-personalized content feeds result in a lack of exposure to viewpoints that are outside a user's existing worldview.

Filter bubbles can cause people to develop an us-vs-them view of the world. The less familiar we are with others, the less empathy we tend to have for them.



## Clickbait

A framing method that uses exaggerated language and omitted information to entice readers to click through or watch.

Upworthy was the quintessential purveyor of "You won't believe what happened next" headlines.



## Surveillance capitalism

The capture and monetization of personal data.

Browser fingerprinting is one example of this activity. When you visit certain news sites, third-party vendors scan your device and browser settings to track you online. Most users are unaware this is happening.



## Churnalism

When media outlets publish press releases and other forms of pre-packaged content, instead of original reporting.

This helps outlets meet their content needs, but undermines trust as these messages are often optimized for public relations or promotional objectives.



## Algorithmic radicalization

The hypothesis that recommendation engines can steer users towards increasingly extreme content on social platforms.

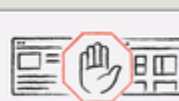
On platforms like TikTok which have fast feedback loops to train the algorithm, this can happen in a matter of hours.



## Slacktivism

Publicly supporting political or social causes through low effort social media updates or online petitions.

Symbolic gestures like profile picture flair can feel like activism, but ultimately don't affect change in the real world.



## Paywalls

A mechanism that prevents users from accessing specific content without a paid subscription.

While media sites understandably want to drive revenue, the result is a two-tiered media landscape. Quality news for subscribers, and shallow, sensationalized content for everyone else.



## News deserts

Communities that are no longer served by dedicated local news media.

Instead of receiving important local coverage in a person's own town, they hear about what Florida Man did today.



## Media consolidation

Formerly independent outlets being bought up by larger media corporations, creating the illusion of choice.

Parent companies can distribute talking points across their entire network of outlets, creating a powerful conduit for propaganda and partisan messaging.



## Social bots

Autonomous or human-run accounts on social media platforms that manipulate discussions and boost specific messages.

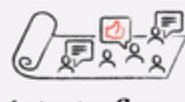
While @Name69420 accounts may seem obvious or harmless, they alter the tone of online discourse and artificially boost the spread of messages.



## Ad clutter

When the usability of a news website is impacted by pop-ups, auto-play videos, and intrusive banner ads.

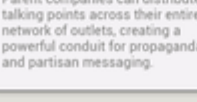
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## Astroturfing

Publishing content that creates the illusion of grassroots interest in a policy or individual.

One example of astroturfing would be op-eds from 'concerned citizens' prior to a police department's budget coming up for a vote.



## Deplatforming

When individuals and communities are banned from social and publishing platforms.

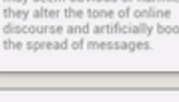
Critics of deplatforming argue that rules are inconsistently enforced, and that bans drive conversations to "the shadows" where communities become increasingly radicalized.



## Context stripping

As stories are shared over social media channels, the most compelling, intuitive framing wins out. This digital "natural selection" strips layers of context away, warping how stories are perceived.

Example: An old clip of a rocket attack is shared out of context during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Without context, many assume it's a recent attack.



## No fly zones

A form of implicit bias that sees topics or subjects excluded from critical coverage due to advertiser relationships.

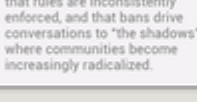
Example: Investigative reporters avoid the auto industry because car companies advertise heavily in their publication.



## Infotainment

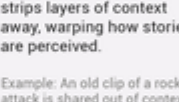
"News" that is optimized to hook viewers in by prioritizing entertainment over actual reporting.

This style of reporting is driven, in part, by competition in the media space. It's not enough to simply deliver the news; it needs to be more compelling than



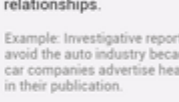
## Horse race journalism

When news coverage focuses on the political maneuvering and strategy of candidates, rather than on the issues and policies they represent.



## Good vs Evil

A form of oversimplification that fits people into



## Footer Tagline

When news coverage focuses on the political maneuvering and strategy of candidates, rather than on the issues and policies they represent.

## Explicit Bias vs. Implicit Bias

Broadly speaking, bias in media breaks down into two types: explicit and implicit.

Publishers with **explicit biases** will overtly dictate the types of stories that are covered in their publications and control the framing of those stories. They usually have a political or ideological leaning, and these outlets will use **narrative fallacies** or **false balance** in an effort to push their own agenda.

Unintentional filtering or skewing of information is referred to as **implicit bias**, and this can manifest in a few different ways. For example, a publication may turn a blind eye to a topic or issue because it would paint an advertiser in a bad light. These are called **no fly zones**, and given the financial struggles of the news industry, these no fly zones are becoming increasingly treacherous territory.

## Misinformation vs. Disinformation

Both of these terms imply that information being shared is not factually sound. The key difference is that misinformation is unintentional, and disinformation is deliberately created to deceive people.

**Fake news** stories, and concepts like deepfakes, fall into the latter category. We broke down the entire spectrum of fake news and how to spot it, in a previous infographic.

## Simplify, Simplify

Mass media and social feeds are the ultimate Darwinistic scenario for ideas.

Through social media, stories are shared widely by many participants, and the most compelling framing usually wins out. More often than not, it's the pithy, provocative posts that spread the furthest. This process strips context away from an idea, potentially warping its meaning.

Video clips shared on social platforms are a prime example of **context stripping** in action. An (often shocking) event occurs, and it generates a massive amount of discussion despite the complete lack of context.

This unintentionally encourages viewers to stereotype the persons in the video and bring our own preconceived ideas to the table to help fill in the gaps.

Members of the media are also looking for punchy story angles to capture attention and prove the point they're making in an article. This can lead to **cherrypicking** facts and ideas. Cherrypicking is especially problematic because the facts are often correct, so they make sense at face value, however, they lack important context.

Simplified models of the world make for compelling narratives, like **good-vs-evil**, but situations are often far more complex than what meets the eye.

## The News Media Squeeze

It's no secret that journalism is facing lean times. Newsrooms are operating with much smaller teams and budgets, and one result is '**churnalism**'. This term refers to the practice of publishing articles directly from wire services and public relations releases.

Churnalism not only replaces more rigorous forms of reporting—but also acts as an avenue for advertising and **propaganda** that is harder to distinguish from the news.

The increased sense of urgency to drive revenue is causing other problems as well. High-quality content is increasingly being hidden behind **paywalls**.

The end result is a two-tiered system, with subscribers receiving thoughtful, high-quality news, and everyone else accessing shallow or sensationalized content. That *everyone else* isn't just people with lower incomes, it also largely includes younger people. The average age of today's paid news subscriber is 50 years old, raising questions about the future of the subscription business model.

For outlets that rely on advertising, desperate times have called for desperate measures. User experience has taken a backseat to ad impressions, with **ad clutter** (e.g. auto-play videos, pop-ups, and prompts) interrupting content at every turn. Meanwhile, in the background, third-party trackers are still watching your every digital move, despite all the privacy opt-in prompts.

## How Can We Fix the Problems with Media?

With great influence comes great responsibility. There is no easy fix to the issues that plague news and social media. But the first step is identifying these issues, and talking about them.

The more media literate we collectively become, the better equipped we will be to reform these broken systems, and push for accuracy and transparency in the communication channels that bind society together.

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*by Tyler Durden*

### Category

1. Freedom-Free speech-Resistance & H-rights
2. Main
3. Media-Soc. media-Internet

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