

[Home](#) > [Debate](#) > [Blogs & Opinions](#) > Check your source

Check your source

Michael Briguglio

Thursday, 30 September 2021, 08:39

Last update: about 51 minutes ago



Within Malta’s social media bubbles, some news often follow a pattern of spin, replication and propagation. This begins when a social media influencer, whether in organizational or individual form, produces a narrative.

This could be articulated through a simple Facebook post, or a blog, a video, an article, a picture, or what have you. Some narratives fade away like shooting stars, but others gain attention. These are shared, commented upon, and possibly reported upon by news sites, influencers, what have you. An opinion or an allegation is transformed into a ‘fact’ merely because it makes the rounds and goes viral.

[open](#)

Designed and developed by Deloitte Digital

Independent Online. ©2021. Standard Publications Ltd. Registered Office: Standard House, Birkirkara Hill, St. Julian's, STJ 1149, Malta.



0:00

-0:00

Sometimes, highly relevant information is missing. Sometimes, information is juxtaposed against other information to create the semblance of causality; Sometimes, the story may be false or exaggerated. Sometimes, an interpretation is presented as hard truth. Very often, one spectacular opinion is pasted and replicated, but actors who are directly involved or who may have alternative views are not even consulted for their perspective on the matter. Valuing second opinions seems to be useful only when it suits one's agenda.

This could be due to various causes. For example, someone may believe that inaccuracies (or lack of transparency) justify the ultimate end of pushing an agenda. Someone else may be in a rush to win the race for likes. Someone else may produce or reproduce inaccuracies unintentionally, or out of loyalty to a cause or organisation.

To complicate matters further, Chinese whispers may be in place: Behind the scenes, groundwork could have been carried out to ensure that one's network – whether within politics, media, activism, or other communities - share the news. Replication of the 'story' helps cement its influence, and the actors involved quote one another within their echo chamber.

I would expect that in a context of free-speech and pluralism, influencers, who may range from politicians to bloggers, from NGOs to journalists, and from corporate interests to sensationalists, would double-check before articulating something in public. Otherwise, we risk having news at the speed of light yet lacking deliberation. We may have surface but not depth, a simulacra of repeated narratives within respective social bubbles. Confirmation bias par excellence, with voices talking past each other rather than to each other.

Paradoxically, I am not surprised at all to find that often, some narratives which go viral do not seem to be replicated in value and perception surveys often carried out in Malta. In short, the reality produced by the influencer-class may be very much confined within its own walls, far away from the grounded realities of many others. These 'others' may also digest the news being spread but may be left with a bad taste. Indeed, sometimes, the production of narratives may have unintended consequences, overkill and be ultimately self-defeating. Getting scores of likes and shares should not be confused with having substantive social impact.

In such a context, I appeal to readers to check one's sources, to read what dares make one uncomfortable, to hear different views and possibilities. Of course, this must be an informed choice: For example, if I want expert advice on my teeth I would consult my dentist, and not someone who decides that he has become a dentist. The same applies for other sources of knowledge. Even though knowledge is itself human and subject to open interpretation, there is a difference between evidence-based recommendations and absolutist speculation

Designed and developed by Deloitte Digital

Independent Online. ©2021. Standard Publications Ltd. Registered Office: Standard House, Birkirkara Hill, St. Julian's, STJ 1149, Malta.

therefore has structures, processes, norms and regulations to ensure that these standards are reached.

Sometimes it takes a long time for a scholar to produce evidence-based knowledge, precisely because they would have used thorough methods for gathering and interpreting data. Sometimes scholars realise that 'reality' is more complex than it seems, that more research is required, and that new findings may alter previous conclusions.

Compare this to the statements at the speed of light which we often encounter in the media sphere. Is it not ironic that in the name of free speech, we often seem to forget the responsibility that should accompany it? Isn't it high time that proper ethics procedures and toolkits are in place so that the public can know who is an accredited journalist or expert, and whether they follow standard guidelines when articulating public statements? Is a social media rant equal to a peer-reviewed scholarly article?

Dr Michael Briguglio is a sociologist and senior lecturer at the University of Malta

www.michaelbriguglio.com

Like 6

Tweet

Share



1 2
0005 500

don't miss

5 for 5: Napoli beat Sampdoria 4-0 to extend perfect start

 Share

Swieqi council holds out against Infrastructure Malta: 'Qasam Road should remain two-way' - Mayor

 Share

Tiny San Marino to vote in referendum on legalising abortion

open

