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# How True News Will Beat Fake News



By Mark Lee Hunter , INSEAD Adjunct Professor and Senior Research Fellow, , INSEAD Professor of Technology and Operations Management, and Maria Besiou , Professor of Humanitarian Logistics at Kühne Logistics University

## **A wave of community-based media is taking audience and influence from the mainstream.**

The conventional wisdom following Donald Trump’s election is that the media campaigned against him, and Trump defeated them. Indeed, he won the Electoral College vote, the one that counts, despite losing the popular vote, and despite the hostility of nearly the totality of America’s mainstream media. But to say “The Media lost” implies that mainstream media (MSM) are the only ones that can sway opinion and action. We disagree.

The real point of what happened on 8 November 2016 is that *other* media, controlled by communities with a specific change agenda, played a decisive role. The MSM no longer served as mediators and gatekeepers between candidates and the public; Trump built his own direct channel to his legacy fans through Twitter and a host of other content creators, sharers and fakers amplified and extended his message through YouTube, websites and blogs. Those media did not need MSM to make their points or find their public. We

call them “stakeholder-driven media” (SDM), because they target communities of interest whose well-being depends on influencing other communities. These media seek above all to protect, promote and prevail for their members.

Breitbart.com, which numerous Trump voters view as a main news source, and whose publisher Steve Bannon is now Trump’s senior counsellor, is only one prominent outlet in the latest generation of stakeholder-driven media on the right, federating the alt-right and nationalist communities. (Indeed, Bannon spent over a decade developing this audience through his films and other media.[1]) The anti-abortion militant and self-certified “investigative reporter” David Daleiden built another SDM that mobilised the anti-abortion movement against Planned Parenthood. An **assassin who raved about “baby parts,”** along with Republican presidential candidates, testified to his impact. On the left, Senator Bernie Sanders benefited from the intense interest of TheRealNews [sic], a self-described “global online video news network that listens to and is dependent on its audience.”

The MSM have not suddenly become irrelevant, but SDM are successfully competing for their audience and their influence. Certainly, the time of news industry “hegemony” over public opinion has ended, if it ever really existed. Since 2005, when the French voted down a treaty that was supported by virtually all the country's MSM, there have been numerous cases of movements that won against established adversaries by creating their own media. **SDM defeated multinationals** like Danone, BP and DuPont. They threaten established powers. That is why Egypt and Russia sought in recent years to exile or imprison NGOs or independent news operators whose reports reach global networks of activists and supporters; that is also why spies and oligarchs create false-flag SDM to defame and isolate their adversaries. It is useless to pretend that SDM are necessarily a force for good. But they are a force we can’t ignore.

In parallel, Trump’s propensity for baseless assertions, the triumph of the pro-Brexit forces despite their non-existent plans in case of victory, and the proliferation of fake news in the last hours and days before the U.S. presidential vote have led to claims that we are in a “post-fact” era. It’s been suggested that the investment by MSM in fact-checking during the 2016 election, a striking feature of news coverage, was wasted because no one cares about facts.

We see it differently. The massive investment in fact-checking by MSM during this election will pay tremendous benefits over time. Their ability to contrast public declarations to reality, in politics and other spheres, instead of simply quoting the full or half-lies of public figures, will become a key element of their value propositions. Providing communities with “actionable” information that can affect their fortunes will be valuable in direct proportion to the number and loudness of liars who seek to trick and impoverish them. This principle has served numerous SDM well over time.

That said, credibility in journalism is no longer a function only of professional standards for veracity and comprehensiveness, if it ever was. It is vested in a community of people who know, trust and believe in each other and the media that represent them. This is the relationship that MSM had, and that many lost over more than a decade of crises that hit their uninformed, unprepared public. It’s now the model that successful SDM are seeking to adapt to a new era, immersed in the communities they serve. Smart MSM managers will partner with SDM who follow it.

*This post is an excerpt from the book Power Is Everywhere: How stakeholder-driven media build the future of watchdog news, which is available for **free download**.*

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**[1] See Adam Wren, “What I Learned Binge-Watching Steve Bannon’s Documentaries”.**

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