

When only men make the news

THE SOUND & THE FURY



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ON the onset, it seems women are everywhere in the media. You switch on the TV, there is inevitably an attractive woman luring you into buying a product. On the radio, there is 'young new thing' vivaciously flirting

women reporters in TV is even worse. Since 2010, the number of TV women reporters has increased by only 1 percent, but overall, they still constitute less than one-fifth of reporters. The only instance where women overshadow men is at hosting shows; in two-thirds of the cases, the hosts are women.

These statistics are downright embarrassing for us who work in news media. At a day and age when women are making their mark in all sectors, no matter how challenging, why is it that journalism remains, still, a male-dominated profession? Why, even today, do the newsrooms remain hostile to female reporters, comfortable to designate "soft" bits to women, such as social welfare, women's issues or at best health or education, while "hard" bits, such as politics, remain the prerogative of men? Women, in the logic of patriarchy, make sense in the supplements, but not in news and business which are "manly" serious affairs. Opinions, too, are apparently a "male" thing, with an overwhelming majority of commentators, whether in print or electronic media, being old, privileged and male.

Yes, it's true that journalism in a country like Bangladesh can pose added security risks to women, when they go out to collect information at random places at random hours of the day, or meet and interview unknown sources; it's also true that the ungodly working hours are not what many women with families can negotiate with ease, in a society where women, even if and when they work outside, are expected to take care of the household and children single-handedly. But rather than enable its women colleagues to face these challenges, for instance, by providing safe transport support and flexible work hours, media houses seem content with the status quo. Even if and when they make these adjustments, such as allowing women to leave early, there is the obvious implication that women just aren't as adept at the job as their male counterparts (how many times have we heard, "This job is just too demanding for women!"), as if the only marker of efficiency is one's ability to stay late in

the office (even if staying in the office means smoking cigarettes and discussing the ongoing IPL match). On the other hand, the "protective" regime of the office can be equally stifling, such as when bosses think that women shouldn't be given challenging tasks with the supposedly good intention of protecting them from harm.

While the NGO, banking and public sectors have made considerable progress in instituting gender-friendly policies, our media houses seem to be stuck in the days of horse shoe tables, copy boys and typewriters. It is unfortunate that most media houses, which should lead by example, do not have a gender policy or strict guidelines on how to institute gender equality within the organisation. Most of them don't even have a sexual harassment policy, or a designated committee to oversee complaints, despite a HC ruling making it mandatory for print and electronic media houses to have a committee in their respective organisations as per Article 9 of the guideline.

Given that it is men in the management positions, it is hardly a surprise that there is

severe resistance to the idea of gender sensitivity trainings, even though as members of the media community, we hold tremendous power over the masses to disseminate and reproduce gender stereotypes and harmful discourses about women and children through what we write (or don't write). So forget that many reporters, subeditors and even editors don't realise that there's something severely problematic in using the word "dishonoured" when referring to rape or in revealing the name and details of the survivors; they fail to see that by circulating the seemingly harmless image of a "violated" and "victimised" woman hiding her face in fear while strong male hands grip her, they are reproducing the idea of women as helpless and weak; they do not comprehend that they reinscribe gender inequality when they only interview male sources or experts, or when they decide a story with a gender dimension is just not "news-y" enough to make a lead story. Within the organisations, these esteemed male colleagues do not seem to understand that it is inappropriate to make crude jokes about women, objectifying them, that unwarranted sexual attention is "sexual harassment" not flattery, that they take up way too much space during meetings when their voice rings the loudest and for the longest, silencing others who may not feel quite as comfortable to challenge the hierarchical power structure of a media house, and that it's institutionalised sexism when you pay the male staff more than the female staff even when they do the same amount of work.

If the media is really to change the world for the better, and play a progressive role in transforming how women are perceived in society, then we must begin by changing our institutions from within. And this task of gender sensitisation should not fall on the women alone, but on the editor, management, board of directors and department heads, who must assess the ways in which their institutions sustain inequality and play a proactive role to recruit more women, promote qualified women to important positions, and ensure a respectable workplace for all. Pretending we're all equal while retaining the same old patriarchal mindsets and structures simply won't do if we want women to also make the news.

The writer is a journalist and activist.



Why the Internet isn't making us smarter

DAVID DUNNING

IN the hours since I first sat down to write this piece, my laptop tells me the National Basketball Association has had to deny that it threatened to cancel its 2017 All-Star Game over a new anti-LGBT law in North Carolina - a story repeated by many news sources including the Associated Press. The authenticity of that viral video of a bear chasing a female snowboarder in Japan has been called into question. And, no, Ted Cruz is not married to his third cousin. It's just one among an onslaught of half-truths and even pants-on-fire lies coming as we rev up for the 2016 American election season. The longer I study human psychology, the more impressed I am with the rich tapestry of knowledge each of us owns. We each have a brainy weave of facts, figures, rules and stories that allows us to address an astonishing range of everyday challenges. Contemporary research celebrates just how vast, organised, interconnected and durable that knowledge base is.

That's the good news. The bad news is that our brains overdo it. Not only do they store helpful and essential information, they are also receptive to false belief and misinformation.

Just in biology alone, many people believe that spinach is a good source of iron (sorry, Popeye), that we use less than 10 per cent of our brains (no, it's too energy-guzzling to allow that), and that some people suffer hypersensitivity to electromagnetic radiation (for which there is no scientific evidence).

But here's the more concerning news. Our access to information, both good and bad, has only increased as our fingertips have gotten into the act. With computer keyboards and smartphones, we now have access to an Internet containing a vast store of

information much bigger than any individual brain can carry - and that's not always a good thing.

This access to the Internet's far reaches should permit us to be smarter and better informed. People certainly assume it. A recent Yale study showed that Internet access causes people to hold inflated, illusory impressions of just how smart and well-informed they are.

But there's a twofold problem with the Internet that compromises its limitless promise.

First, just like our brains, it is receptive to misinformation. In fact, the World Economic Forum lists "massive digital misinformation" as a main threat to society. A survey of 50 "weight loss" websites found that only three provided sound diet advice. Another of roughly 150 YouTube videos about vaccination found that only half explicitly supported the procedure. Rumour-mongers, politicians, vested interests, a sensationalising media and people with intellectual axes to grind all inject false information into the Internet.

So do a lot of well-intentioned but misinformed people. In fact, a study published in the January 2016 Proceedings of National Academy of Science documented just how quickly dubious conspiracy theories spread across the Internet. Specifically, the researchers compared how quickly these rumours spread across Facebook relative to stories on scientific discoveries. Both conspiracy theories and scientific news spread quickly, with the majority of diffusion via Facebook for both types of stories happening within a day.

Making matters worse, misinformation is hard to distinguish from accurate fact. It often has the exact look and feel as the truth. In a series of studies Elanor Williams, Justin Kruger

and I published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology in 2013, we asked students to solve problems in intuitive physics, logic and finance. Those who consistently relied on false facts or principles - and thus gave the exact same wrong answer to every problem - expressed just as much confidence in their conclusions as those who answered every single problem right.

For example, those who always thought a ball would continue to follow a curved path after rolling out of a bent tube (not true) were virtually as certain as people who knew the right answer (the ball follows a straight path).

So, how do we separate Internet truth from the false?

First, don't assume misinformation is obviously distinguishable from true information. Be careful. If the matter is important, perhaps you can start your search with the Internet; just don't end there. Consult and consider other sources of authority. There is a reason why your doctor suffered medical school, why your financial advisor studied to gain that license.

Second, don't do what conspiracy theorists did in the Facebook study. They readily spread stories that already fit their worldview. As such, they practiced confirmation bias, giving credence to evidence supporting what they already believed. As a consequence, the conspiracy theories they endorsed burrowed themselves into like-minded Facebook communities who rarely questioned their authenticity.

Instead, be a skeptic. Psychological research shows that groups designating one or two of its members to play devil's advocates - questioning whatever conclusion the group is leaning toward - make for better-

reasoned decisions of greater quality.

If no one else is around, it pays to be your own devil's advocate. Don't just believe what the Internet has to say; question it. Practice a disconfirmation bias. If you're looking up medical information about a health problem, don't stop at the first diagnosis that looks right. Search for alternative possibilities.

In addition, look for ways in which that diagnosis might be wrong. Research shows that "considering the opposite" - actively asking how a conclusion might be wrong - is a valuable exercise for reducing unwarranted faith in a conclusion. After all, you should listen to Mark Twain, who, according to a dozen different websites, warned us, "Be careful about reading health books. You may die of a misprint."

Wise words, except a little more investigation reveals more detailed and researched sources with evidence that it wasn't Mark Twain, but German physician Markus Herz who said them. I'm not surprised; in my Internet experience, I've learned to be wary of Twain quotes (Will Rogers, too). He was a brilliant wit, but he gets much too much credit for quotable quips.

Misinformation and true information often look awfully alike. The key to an informed life may not require gathering information as much as it does challenging the ideas you already have or have recently encountered. This may be an unpleasant task, and an unending one, but it is the best way to ensure that your brainy intellectual tapestry sports only true colors.

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BEETLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

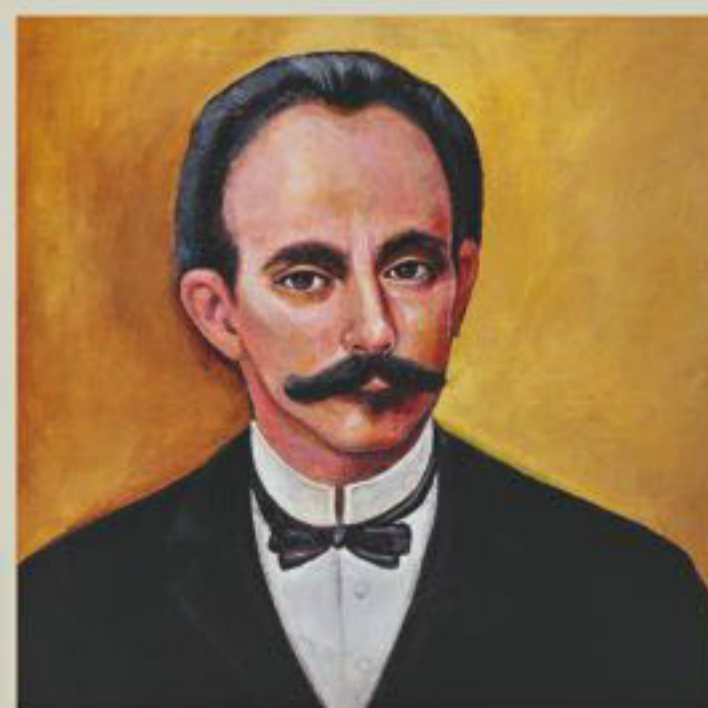
- ACROSS
- Sweet liqueur
 - Straight beater
 - Stop worrying
 - Joust need
 - Storage site
 - Terrible
 - Spectrum color
 - Justice Fortas
 - Slip
 - Playwright Hellman
 - Fresh prefix
 - Harpoons
 - Vague
 - New stems
 - Stir-fry pan
 - Restaurant VIP
 - Common verb
 - Toward the stern
 - Wisconsin city
 - Dance of Brazil
 - Pitcher Ryan
 - Hiking route
 - Minotaur's home
 - Burn a bit
 - Cut off
- DOWN
- Cowardly
 - Stop working
 - Corrida critter
 - Postal delivery
 - Packing material
 - Ga. neighbor
 - Bar concern
 - Not just
 - Enjoys the reef
 - Daughter of Leda
 - Tout
 - 1983 #1 hit for David Bowie
 - Put down
 - Word, in Paris
 - Game outing
 - Torpedo
 - Lamented loudly
 - Lamented loudly
 - Ship poles
 - Hockey stuff
 - Whopping
 - Stout relative



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

A	B	H	O	R	A	C	E	S
P	I	E	C	E	E	R	O	D
P	O	R	E	D	M	I	L	N
E	A	S	T	A	D	A	M	
A	K	I	N	A	C	D	C	
G	L	N	I	R	O	N	O	
E	L	M	E	R	C	E	L	L
S	O	Y	M	I	L	K	D	N
H	O	S	E	S	H	A	D	
F	E	E	T	D	O	P	E	
A	V	A	I	L	P	I	A	N
V	E	R	V	E	A	R	R	O
A	N	T	E	S	L	E	T	M

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