2020 Ethnic Media Disinformation Fellowship

A partnership between the National Conference on Citizenship & Ethnic Media Services

ALGORITHMIC TRANSPARENCY INSTITUTE

NCoC
National Conference on Citizenship

Executive Summary

Viral misinformation has been a fixture of civic discourse long before there was social media. The 2016 U.S. election raised the profile of this challenge, but then in 2020 something new evolved: we witnessed the rise of what the World Health Organization has termed an "infodemic." The diversity and scale of the problem has evolved and expanded dramatically, and our efforts to understand and combat it have failed to keep pace. In the United States, this failure has been particularly acute with historically marginalized and underserved communities.

Our team at the Algorithmic Transparency Institute, a project of the National Conference on Citizenship, developed a pilot program to train ethnic media reporters to identify, surface, and analyze instances of problematic content impacting issues of key public significance in the United States in 2020: the U.S. census, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the U.S. presidential election.

We use the term "problematic content" to describe the range of messages we attempt to understand and address. This includes: mis- and disinformation, hate speech, conspiracies, and messages that lack context or employ flaws in logic. We investigate both false and misleading content as well as content that may not be factually incorrect, but can have ill effects nonetheless.

With this program we focused specifically on problematic content spreading in underserverd, immigrant and diaspora communities and in languages other than English because the problematic messages spreading in these spaces have historically been harder to capture, and less researched and reported on than English language and mainstream messages. This type of content also frequently spreads in closed and encrypted communications platforms that are nearly impossible to explore by anyone but the members of their respective communities.

To accomplish this goal, we trained a team of ethnic media reporters to identify, monitor, verify, and report problematic content found in their communities and languages. This team monitored open and closed social media and developed lists of accounts, hashtags, and search terms, so they could find and submit new content on a weekly basis to Junkipedia.org, our proprietary platform for collecting and analyzing problematic content.

Over the course of 2020, we worked with nine fellows representing Arabic, Black, Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Korean, and Latino communities. Collectively, this team monitored from March through December 2020 and reported 1,968 distinct issues to our system.

The work produced by this team of ethnic media reporting fellows contributed to broader efforts to address many forms of misinformation by news organizations, research groups, and critically, civil society organizations. In collaboration with Census Counts, our team identified census-related misinformation that informed get-out-the-count efforts by civil rights organizations. This collaboration also enabled the Census Bureau itself to escalate problematic narratives on its Rumor Control page and with social media platforms.

Our team also identified misinformation related to the pandemic and the 2020 U.S. election that enhanced mainstream media reporting, bolstered research programs, and informed outreach and training efforts to educate communities about how to recognize and respond to misinformation.

This pilot program identified key insights about the nature of problematic content spreading in ethnic communities as well as the value and needs of the ethnic media reporting ecosystem. Our fellows learned a great deal about how to monitor and respond to problematic content, and they taught us key lessons about how critical it is to support professional development and engagement with this underserved sector of the media industry.

This report details the approach, timeline, challenges, impacts, and takeaways from the 2020 ATI Ethnic Media fellowship program. It concludes with a vision for expanding this type of training and engagement effort as an integrated component of a broader blueprint for civic listening to build long-lasting resiliency to misinformation.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank our collaborators on this project, Ethnic Media Services, for identifying fellows, fundraising, and program administration. We would especially like to thank Sandra Close, Jaya Padmanabhan, and Jessica Martin, as well as all of our fellows — Oni Advincula, Hazel Trice Edney, Jongwon Lee, Pilar Marrero, Vidya Pradhan, Mariela Santos-Muñiz, Vidya Pradhan, Faisal Tbeileh, Rong Xiaoqing, and Chi Zhang — without whom this work would not have been possible. This effort would not exist if not for our National Conference on Citizenship colleague Kyla Fullenwider, who helped build and fundraise for this unique partnership. We would also like to thank our funders — Luminate, New Venture Fund, and Karen Narasaki — for their generous support of the program.

Introduction

Underserved communities are significantly impacted by the spread of misinformation, but far too often efforts to address this challenge have failed to engage with these communities directly to participate in the process of understanding and responding to the problem. Critical civic institutions such as the census or elections, as well as our response to a health crisis, require that we mobilize as one to fulfill a shared responsibility to one another. In these times, our success depends on the inclusion of everyone, particularly the marginalized communities where people of color and non-English speakers make the difference, be it a win or a loss, what is right or wrong, sometimes even life or death.

Working to address the impacts of misinformation on underserved communities means working with and for underserved communities. Local ethnic media publications are a critical institution within these communities largely because they are produced by members of the community who are on the ground, who speak the language, and who understand the unique cultural context required to accurately report on and address the concerns of their friends and neighbors. Ethnic media reporters already have the research, investigative, and communications skills to tackle the challenge of misinformation; they only lack technical skills, resources, and the attention of the larger institutions focused on the problem.

This program was designed specifically to build on the capacity of ethnic media reporters to fill a massive gap in our collective understanding of how problematic content impacts these communities, and at the same time to bring more resources and training to a underserved sector of the media industry that has tremendous potential to improve the quality of our shared discourse and increase the distribution of trusted reliable information.

Focus

While the problem of misinformation received increasing attention from the media in the wake of the 2016 presidential election and the 2018 midterms, most coverage of the problem focused on English-language content and native English-speaking audiences. However, we know that problematic content is not unique to the English language nor the United States. Compounding the problem is the lack of moderation resources from social media platforms in languages other than English, which can have devastating real-world consequences.

Our focus was to identify and track problematic content spreading about the 2020 U.S. census, the Covid-19 pandemic, racial justice protests (and counter-protests) spurred by George Floyd's murder, and the U.S. presidential election. We specifically wanted to understand and make visible the ways in which misinformation about these topics mirrored or diverged from their manifestation in English-speaking and white communities.

Program Goals

This program had several key goals focused on training, monitoring, reporting, and analysis:

Training

We aimed to train our team of ethnic media reporting fellows to:

- Identify problematic content
- Use social media and monitoring tools to find problematic content
- Report instances of problematic content to Junkipedia
- Analyze and verify the problems within content

Monitoring and Reporting

Once trained, we aimed to have our fellows:

- Monitor content within their community on a weekly basis
- Dedicate eight hours over the course of a week to finding instances and reporting them to Junkipedia

Analysis

For the content submitted, we hoped for our fellows to:

- Verify the substance and claims within messages
- Identify and describe the logical or factual problems with the claims
- Feed their learnings into future monitoring activities

The program's first goal was to track problematic content related to the 2020 U.S. Census. Census stakeholders — especially those representing "hard to count" communities — were concerned about the fight over a "citizenship question" on the 2020 questionnaire and the problematic content that could result. Of greatest concern was the impact of problematic content on a complete and accurate census count.

As the year progressed, we expanded our mandate to track additional national events: the Covid-19 pandemic, racial justice protests and counter-protests, and the U.S. presidential election.

Approach

Our partner in this program, Ethnic Media Services (EMS), assisted with identifying potential fellows from a diversity of communities with whom EMS works. Our fellows represented Arab, Black, Chinese, Filippino, Indian, Korean, and Latino communities. EMS also hosted two webinar briefings for their large network of ethnic media reporters. The first, held in April, introduced the concept of problematic content and briefed reporters on potential problematic narratives that could target the census. The second, held in October, briefed reporters on election-related issues, including voter suppression.

Our program began with a series of training workshops held via video conference where we introduced the key concepts of problematic content, including the core types of problematic content, where and how that content spreads, and why it can be dangerous. We then provided sessions on verification skills, social media monitoring, and content reporting to Junkipedia. Each week, we held video meetings with the entire fellowship cohort to share learnings from the previous week, create a space to ask questions and identify challenges, and to provide advice and forecast for upcoming challenges based on broader trends and news events.

Training: Identifying and Monitoring Problematic Content

Fellows learned how to identify a number of different types of problematic content, including fabricated, manipulated, and outdated content; imposter social media accounts; plagiarized text; conspiracies; pseudoscience; and contextual problems. We use the umbrella term "problematic content" as it encompasses several kinds of content: mis- and disinformation, hate speech, conspiracies, and other content that may not be factually incorrect, but can have ill effects nonetheless.

As part of training, we shared a number of resources with the fellows:

- "First Draft's Essential Guide to" series, including:
  - "Understanding Information Disorder", by Claire Wardle
  - "How journalists can responsibly report on manipulated pictures and video", by Victoria Kwan
  - "Newsgathering and Monitoring on the Social Web", by Carlotta Dotto and Rory Smith
  - "Verifying Online Information", by Shaydanay Urbani
  - "Closed Groups, Messaging Apps and Online Ads", by Claire Wardle and Carlotta Dotto
- "How to Use TweetDeck for Open Source Investigations", by Jake Creps, Global Investigative Journalism Network
- "Digital security tips for journalists: Protecting sources and yourself", by David Trilling, Journalist's Resource
- Resources from the Media Manipulation Casebook, by the Technology and Social Change project, led by Joan Donovan

Fellows learned how to find problematic content through source and topic monitoring. **Source monitoring** involves iteratively identifying users/accounts who consistently spread problematic content and following what they post over time. **Topic monitoring** requires identifying keywords associated with a current event or problematic narrative and using them to find related content. Fellows monitored both sources and topics on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok, WhatsApp, WeChat, and KakaoTalk. The fellows learned how to craft Boolean search queries and find relevant hashtags across different platforms to surface problematic content.

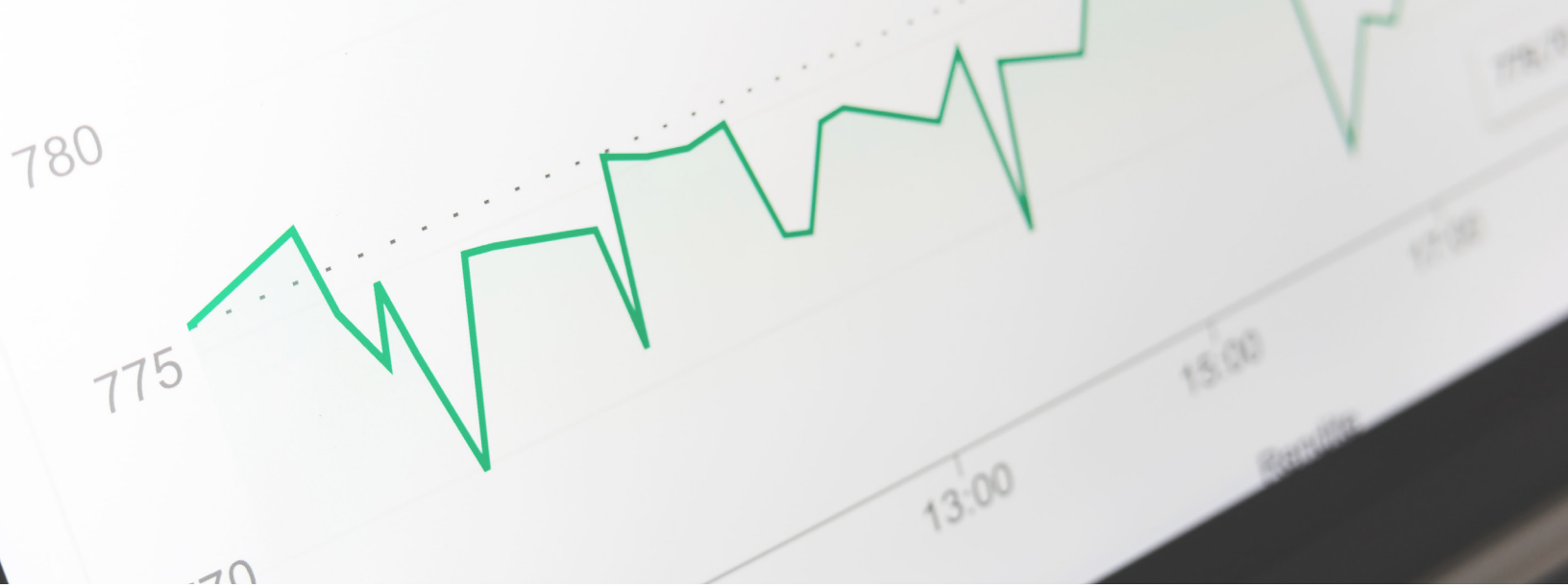
CrowdTangle, a social listening tool that fellows used to surface content from Facebook and Instagram, was also an important part of monitoring. Fellows received initial training from the ATI team as a group and at least one individual session. We found individual sessions to be particularly useful, as CrowdTangle has a steep learning curve, especially for those who are less technically savvy. We also held one-on-one training sessions with fellows to help them develop sources. These were useful as each fellow's strategies were slightly different given the community they covered and the platforms they monitored. Many fellows reported that these sessions were particularly helpful.

Training: Well-Being and Emotional Resiliency

Repeatedly viewing hateful, violent, false, and antagonistic content can take an emotional toll. The non-stop newscycle of 2020, including violence at protests/counter-protests, the pandemic, and election all resulted in an uptick in the spread of toxic content online. We made sure fellows were aware of the potential risks of repeatedly engaging with such content, the signs that they are being negatively affected by the content, and strategies for performing this work while taking care of their mental health. Above all, we encouraged fellows to be mindful about the length and amount of time they spent viewing such content. We shared the tips and resources on secondary trauma from the UC Berkeley Human Rights Center and First Draft.

Operations: Fellows' Work

On a continuous basis, the fellows monitored the social networks most relevant to their communities and submitted the content to Junkipedia. ATI staff met twice weekly with the Census Bureau, Leadership Conference, and other stakeholders to report and discuss relevant problematic content.



Each week, ATI staff would ask the fellows to monitor certain topics. In March and April the fellows monitored for content about the census and the pandemic. Toward the end of summer, we asked the fellows to begin monitoring for election-related content. Occasionally, we would ask fellows to complete an assignment. As the QAnon conspiracy gained ground in the spring and summer months, we hosted a session with the fellows to brief them on the key tenets of the conspiracy, taught them relevant keywords, and then asked them to translate them and monitor for QAnon content in their communities.

ATI staff met together with the fellows over Zoom for one hour each week. During these office hours the fellows would discuss what they had seen in their monitoring over the course of the week and share the broad themes they noticed, as well as examples of relevant content they had surfaced.

Program Evaluation

ATI evaluated the successes and challenges of this project in several ways. After initial training, ATI staff hosted one-on-one sessions with each fellow to discuss their monitoring strategies in close detail, to answer any questions and gather feedback about training, and to provide hands-on help using tools like CrowdTangle and Junkipedia. At the conclusion of the fellowship, we had additional individual exit interviews to learn more about the fellows' experiences.

Additionally, we evaluated the program through a set of surveys (one given prior to the training at the beginning of the fellowship, and one at the conclusion of the fellowship) and asked each fellow to write a short report about the insights they had gained through the program. We also tracked metrics related to content the fellows collected, including total instances in each language; instances collected from closed messaging platforms; and responses to problematic content.

Impact

Successes

Despite the challenges we all faced in this unique year, the fellowship program achieved many successes. Our fellows contributed a total of 1,968 pieces of problematic content to Junkipedia, accounting for approximately 25% of all content submitted to Junkipedia in 2020. Every fellow successfully used Junkipedia to submit, annotate, and review problematic content.

Content surfaced by fellows also helped to inform actions taken by the Census Bureau. The discovery of the "home affairs hoax" spreading in languages other than English led the Bureau to include the hoax on its Rumor Control page.

We were also able to assist Facebook's QAnon moderation efforts in advance of the election by providing them with keywords in English, Korean, and Japanese*, as well as lists of QAnon groups, pages, and accounts that evaded previous moderation efforts.

As a result of training, fellows' ability to recognize, verify, and report on problematic content increased. Our pre- and post-fellowship surveys asked about the fellows' comfort with different social media platforms, their ability to find and identify problematic content spreading in their communities, and their verification skills — and demonstrated these results.

Finding and monitoring problematic content: Fellows improved their ability to find closed messaging groups for monitoring and formulating effective Boolean search queries. Every fellow ended the program "agreeing" or "strongly agreeing" that they can recognize misleading content when they see it in a news article or on social media. Eight out of nine fellows ended the program "strongly agreeing" that they know where to go to find examples of problematic content relevant to their communities.

Verifying content: Fellows' skills improved in image verification, analyzing social media profiles (including assessing if the profiles are imposter accounts), and verifying source texts and quotes.

Understanding the scope and scale of problematic content: In their exit interviews and final reports, multiple fellows mentioned that the program had helped them expand their media diets to include sources and information that they wouldn't have otherwise seen in their own social media feeds and news consumption. This led to a better understanding of the scope of problematic content in their communities and its impact when not addressed. Nearly every fellow reported that problematic content is both larger in volume and its creators more active in pushing it than they realized.

**Note: Fellow Jongwon Lee assisted with translating QAnon keywords in Korean and Japanese.*

TOTAL INSTANCES OF PROBLEMATIC CONTENT IDENTIFIED IN EACH COMMUNITY:

Arabic: 18

Black: 40

Chinese: 435

Filippino: 169

Indian: 237

Korean: 296

Latino: 518

TOTAL INSTANCES OF PROBLEMATIC CONTENT COLLECTED FROM CLOSED MESSAGING PLATFORMS:

WeChat: 253

WhatsApp: 81

KaKaoTalk: 45

TOTAL INSTANCES OF PROBLEMATIC CONTENT COLLECTED ABOUT KEY NARRATIVES:

Census: 119

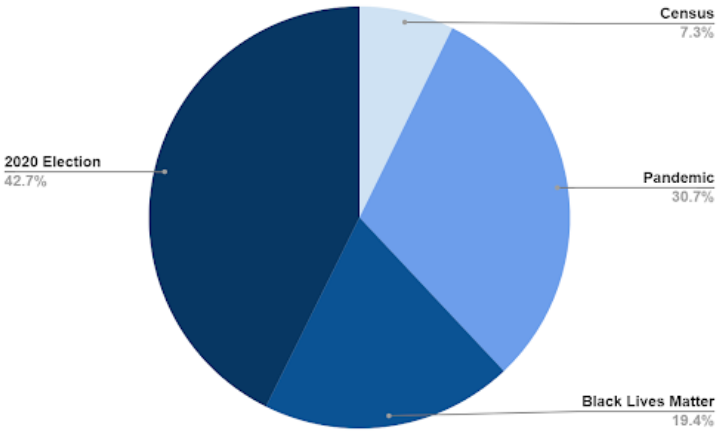
Pandemic: 503

Black Lives Matter: 317

2020 Election: 699

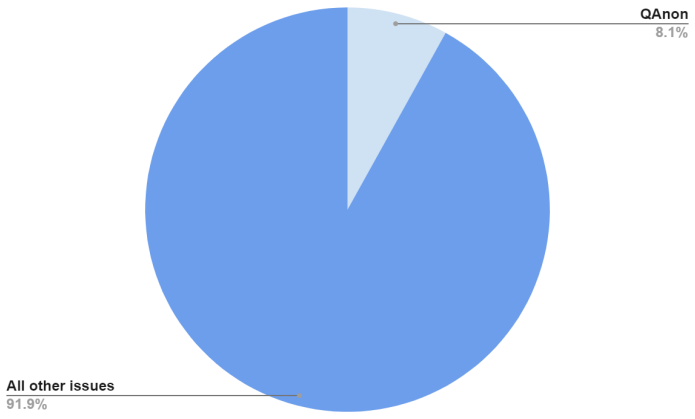
What was most valuable? Fellows reported that the most valuable parts of the fellowship were exchange with other fellows during office hours, as well as training on new skills and tools like image verification and CrowdTangle. During office hours, fellows had the opportunity to learn about what other fellows were seeing in their own communities and were often astonished to see the same problematic content spreading across their communities.

TOTAL INSTANCES OF PROBLEMATIC CONTENT COLLECTED ABOUT KEY NARRATIVES



The QAnon conspiracy theory, which first emerged in 2017, exploded in popularity in 2020 as the pandemic set in and people found themselves spending more time online. Conspiratorial thinking infected many of the year's most important narratives, especially the pandemic and election. Of the issues fellows submitted, approximately 8% were related to QAnon in some way.

PROPORTION OF ISSUES RELATED TO QANON CONSPIRACIES SUBMITTED BY FELLOWS



For a selection of fellows' coverage of problematic content, including news stories reported and inoculation messages shared, please see the appendix.

Challenges

The program met its fair share of challenges related to the work itself and the broader context of 2020. Our initial training was planned to take place in person in March 2020, but had to be rapidly re-tooled to be given virtually as a result of the pandemic.

Technical savvy: Our fellows came to the program with varying degrees of technical skills. Some fellows came to the program with only a very basic understanding of social media platforms, which resulted in some difficulty learning tools like CrowdTangle. Effectively setting up monitoring on CrowdTangle requires a high level of familiarity with Facebook, Instagram, and social media concepts (like engagements, re-shares, and the differences between groups, pages, and profiles).

Limits of monitoring tools: Most social listening tools have limits that affect monitoring. For instance, CrowdTangle cannot track private groups where problematic content often spreads, but can track public groups and pages. This divide between public and private groups was confusing to some fellows, and frustrating to all. Additionally, CrowdTangle's search function does not work equally well across languages and alphabets. While Korean, Japanese, and Spanish queries usually worked fine, Indian and Chinese language searches produced scant relevant results. Overall, fellows with fewer technical skills struggled to adopt the tool and required more individual training.

Cultivating sources: The fellows' ability to cultivate sources was determinative of their success. Some fellows, especially those who were actively working as journalists, came to the program with a robust set of sources within their communities. Those who did not needed to spend more time discovering sources and did not have access to more isolated parts of their communities. Groups on closed messaging apps also proved difficult for some to gain access to, especially groups based on close ties (like familial or religious communities).

A torrent of content: The small size of the fellowship program meant that fellows faced an overwhelming amount of content to sort through and prioritize for reporting. While two fellows monitored the Chinese community and two fellows monitored the Latino community, the other communities were each represented by a single fellow. Almost every fellow expressed being overwhelmed by the volume of problematic content, especially in the days immediately following the presidential election. Practically speaking, this meant fellows had to pick and choose which pieces of content to report, as it was simply not possible to capture it all. Relatedly, we asked the fellows to translate non-English content when they submitted it to Junkipedia. Because Junkipedia is accessed mainly by English speakers, it was extremely valuable for our other users to be able to see a translated version of the content. However, this added to the amount of time it took fellows to annotate their reported content.

Key Survey Responses

As a result of our training, the majority of fellows said their skills improved with regard to verification skills, including finding the original location an image was captured (seven out of nine), identifying when and where a website was registered (seven out of nine), identifying imposter social media accounts (six out of nine), recognizing misleading images and text-based content (five out of nine), locating the date a social media profile was created (five out of nine), using Boolean search queries to surface problematic content (five out of nine). Eight out of nine fellows finished the program "strongly agreeing" that they know where to find problematic content relevant to their communities.

What goals did you have in participating when deciding to participate in this fellowship, and do you feel like you achieved those goals? The most popular goals fellows shared were learning to identify problematic content (six out of nine), countering problematic narratives through reporting and/or direct response (six out of nine), and helping their communities access trustworthy information (nine out of nine). All nine fellows said they achieved the majority of their goals.

"I was interested in learning how misinformation spreads in my community and how to spot it. The fellowship gave me a lot of tools to help do that." - *Vidya Pradhan*

"My main goals were to stay on top of the current landscape of misinformation, and to connect with leading organizations working in this space. I certainly achieved those goals." - *Chi Zhang*

"I do feel like I accomplished my goals to learn how to identify mis-and disinformation in Latinx communities, where to go look for it, and to successfully input problematic information into Junkipedia." - *Mariela Santos-Muñiz*

"My primary goal was to find out what types of misinformation and disinformation shared, posted and distributed in the Filipino American community — and I believe I achieved this goal." - Oni Advincula

What parts of the project were most valuable to you? Overall, fellows said they enjoyed being part of the program and learned much about the complexities of the information environment. Fellows said they learned the most from training and skill building sessions on the various platforms, tools, and techniques for finding and verifying content (six out of nine). Every fellow also said weekly office hours were key to their wider understanding of the information space.

"Learning all the various social media sites was most valuable."
- Hazel Trice Edney

"Discussing what we found in different communities helped me understand the scale of the problems, and it also often inspired me to look at things from different angles."
- Rong Xiaoqing

"One of my favorite things was [learning] what was going on in other communities."
- Pilar Marrero

"[I improved my] understanding of how a small group of individuals can have a major impact on the political discourse, especially during a highly contested election."
- Faisal Tbeileh

What parts of this project were the most challenging for you? Fellows found a few aspects of the program to be challenging, providing us with important feedback that we will address in the next iteration of the fellowship. Fellows whose communities use platforms like WhatsApp sometimes struggled to gain access to closed groups (two of nine). Others found technical aspects of the work difficult, including navigating social media platforms they weren't familiar with (two out of nine) and learning the many tools and strategies for verification (three of nine). Additionally, nearly all fellows expressed feeling emotionally exhausted by the content they were exposed to and overwhelmed by the sheer volume problematic content.

What We Learned

Information Streams

There are similarities and differences between English-language problematic content and problematic content appearing in other languages. These information streams are not totally siloed from one another, and the flow of specific content and general themes between and among them offers interesting insights for researchers and practitioners.

Same content, different communities: Similar pieces of problematic content — or a more general narrative — can spread in different languages simultaneously.

In advance of the 2020 election, stories spread about content on a laptop allegedly belonging to Hunter Biden. We saw problematic content about the laptop spreading in English and simultaneously in Chinese-speaking communities. Conservative Chinese influencers, like expatriate businessman Guo Wengui, pushed out this content. Similar content spread in conservative spaces online in English at the same time.

Problematic content about the coronavirus and Covid-19 pandemic touched every community fellows monitored. Especially in communities where natural health and alternative/traditional medicine are popular, false cures and preventative treatments for Covid-19 abounded.

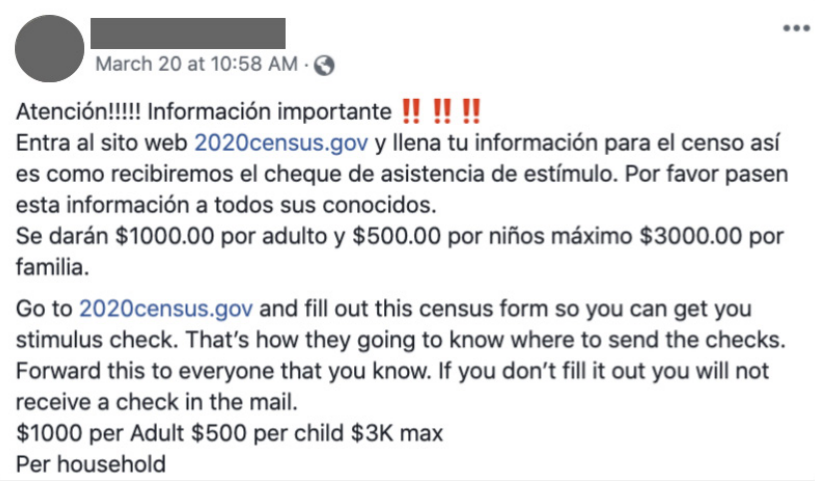
Rong Xiaoqing

Claims in Chinese about Hunter Biden, Chi Zhang

Problematic content about the coronavirus and Covid-19 pandemic touched every community fellows monitored. Especially in communities where natural health and alternative/ traditional medicine are popular, false cures and preventative treatments for Covid-19 abounded.

English content that's been translated: Problematic content originally posted in English can be translated into many other languages.

During the U.S. census, a hoax that originated in South Africa spread in multiple languages in the United States. The hoax stated that robbers disguised as workers from the "Department of Home Affairs" would use the census as a cover to break into homes. Fellows found this hoax spreading in Korean and Chinese. A Latina activist also shared a version of the hoax in English.



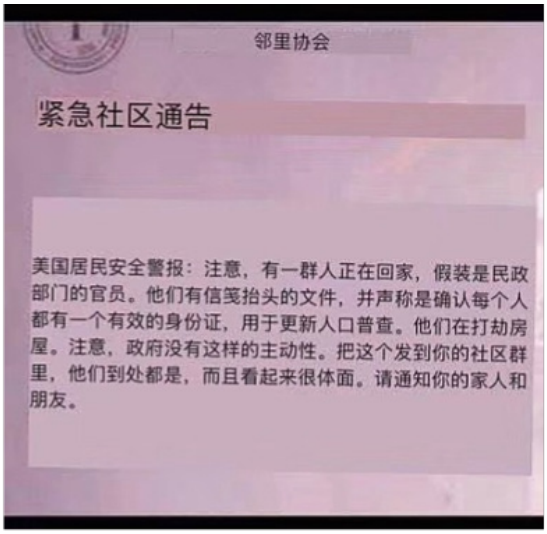
Claims about the census and stimulus checks in Spanish and English, Pilar Marrero

Likewise, fellows also discovered problematic content from popular English-language influencers and outlets that had been translated. One WeChat outlet provides Chinese captions for PragerU videos, which often share problematic content from a right-wing perspective.

Community-specific problematic content: Content or general narratives may resonate with a specific community. Though messages linking the Democratic party and President Joe Biden to socialism were a common attack line during the 2020 campaign, the narrative that Biden and the Democrats were the same as Nicolás Maduro and Fidel Castro was specific to Latino communities.

Similarly, conservative Chinese groups sought to tie Joe Biden to the Chinese Communist Party. Though language tying Democrats to the CCP penetrated into other communities, it was notably popular in conservative Chinese groups.

PragerU video subtitled in Chinese, Chi Zhang



Home Affairs hoax appearing in Chinese, Rong Xiaoqin

Home Affairs hoax appearing in Korean, Jongwon Lee

Pilar Marrero

Mariela Santos-Muñiz

Community Access

We believe it is important that ethnic media responsibly report on problematic narratives, as they have the best access to and understanding of their own communities. However, even members of the same community may not all have access to the types of spaces in which problematic content spreads. For example, many Indian and Latino communities use the closed messaging platform WhatsApp. WhatsApp groups are often created on familial or fraternal bases and it may not be possible for a journalist or researcher to gain access to such groups if they don't already have close ties to the groups' members.

Some communities also require more expansive coverage given their internal diversity. India's government recognizes 22 languages from several different language families. A plurality of Indian-Americans speak Hindi, but other languages are key to gaining a clearer picture of the information landscape. Latinos are also a large and diverse immigrant group within the U.S., with much to understand about different countries of origin, ethnicities, religious traditions, and other subcultures within it. A diversity of reporters from each community (diversity of age, language, religious background, gender, etc.) would only strengthen coverage.

Some immigrant communities may communicate in English often, like Latinos and Filipinos. Similarly, many Black Americans and immigrants communicate in English. However, these groups' respective online spaces and media diets can be quite different. There is great diversity within English-language information environments and they deserve unique attention. These communities can still remain isolated from efforts to combat problematic content (like fact checks) that focus on the kinds of narratives spreading in mainstream English language spaces. As described above, problematic narratives can differ across communities.

NEXT STEPS

Given our success with a small group of fellows, we believe we could achieve greater impact by evolving and expanding the program based on our learnings.

Program Expansion

We considered this small group of fellows to be a pilot program for a larger future effort. With a new administration in the White House and the continuing pandemic and roll out of vaccines, we know the flow of problematic content is unlikely to abate any time soon. We believe it is important to continue engaging ethnic media in the fight against problematic content.

We recommend expanding the program to increase the number of fellows monitoring each community, and to expand the number of communities and languages the program reaches. In a subsequent program, we would increase the diversity of our fellows cohort in several ways:

Expanding language and community coverage: Based on the best available census data about languages spoken in the U.S. and recommendations from fellows, we recommend adding coverage to the following languages: Vietnamese, Russian, Haitian Creole, Portugese, and Tamil. Given the impact of the pandemic on Native American nations, we recommend recruiting at least one Native fellow. Increasing the number of fellows monitoring in the Black community, and in Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Tagalog, and Arabic would further strengthen the program.

Increase diversity of fellows' ages: Our pilot cohort skewed older in age. By recruiting some younger fellows to the program, we believe we will have access to online spaces known to and occupied by younger users. Fellows who are younger are also more likely to be native technology and social media users, and may find monitoring tools easier to master.

Community ties: Our most successful fellows came to the program with many strong ties to their communities, either through their own personal lives or through work as ethnic media journalists. For our next cohort of fellows, we would select those who have strong existing community ties, whether that be through source cultivation from previous reporting, ties to a religious community, or involvement with other community groups targeted by problematic content. When surveyed, eight out of nine fellows emphasized the importance of being well-connected to the communities they cover, especially as it relates to finding sources.

Empower fellows to better respond to problematic content: All fellows said they would have liked to have a greater immediate impact on problematic content. The focus of our pilot cohort was to discover and escalate instances of problematic content about the census to census stakeholders, like the Bureau and Leadership Conference. Content the fellows collected regarding the pandemic and election continue to be utilized by other Junkipedia users and informs ongoing ATI research. Though these groups did act on content our fellows found, it wasn't always immediate or apparent. In the next iteration of the program, we will place greater emphasis in training on how to respond to problematic content. This will provide more direct impacts and better demonstrate the value of the program to fellows and funders.

Training: Technical Skill Building

Finding, monitoring, and verifying problematic content online requires a degree of familiarity with and comfort using social media and the internet. Fellows who came to the program with less experience using technology struggled more than those with more experience and required more individual help. If we expand the fellowship program, it will be important to ensure fellows come to the program with a thorough understanding of social media and the internet. Additional features we've since built into the Junkipedia platform will also provide a simpler interface for monitoring many platforms at once.

Training: Closed Messaging Groups

For some fellows whose communities tend to use closed messaging groups, finding sources and accessing those groups was challenging. In future cohorts, we will expand our training on source cultivation on closed messaging apps.

Demonstrating Impact

Most fellows said they would have liked to better understand the impact of their work and expressed the desire to respond and counter problematic content they saw in the moment. Several fellows responded to false claims they saw with trustworthy information. In the future, we will 1. better demonstrate the direct impact of their work as it's happening, 2. increase training on effective ways to counter problematic content, and 3. require fellows to publish fact checks, inoculation messages, or other informational resources in a more regular fashion.

Tighter integration with other programs

The next phase of this program must integrate the work of ethnic media reporters more tightly with other efforts to identify and combat misinformation on social media. We believe this integration will be a key component of a broader campaign we're calling "a blueprint for civic listening." The insights surfaced by the next cohort of ethnic media fellows will need to feed into the communications and outreach strategies of civil rights organizations, academic research programs, and significantly expand news reporting. These channels of communication also need to be bi-directional, so that insights coming from those other efforts also inform the ongoing work of the fellows, helping them to target and focus on the most critical narratives that impact our discourse. By making ethnic media a core pillar of the blueprint for civic listening, we aim to build a more holistic approach to understanding and addressing problematic content.

CONCLUSION

The 2020 ATI Ethnic Media Disinformation Reporting Fellowship program achieved measurable success with each of our core goals for the project. When the program was conceived, we feared but did not expect the torrent of misinformation that we ultimately encountered in 2020.

While we are extremely pleased with the value we were able to provide to our pilot cohort, and we are thoroughly impressed with and proud of the growth this team of reporting fellows has achieved in such a short span of time, so much work remains to be done. The scale of effort this dedicated team was able to marshall can scarcely match the size of the problem we face today. To effectively translate what we learned through this program into meaningful positive impact on our discourse going forward, we must redouble our efforts and expand both the quantity and diversity of ethnic media reporters engaged in combating the ongoing infodemic, a plague that will likely persist well beyond any pandemic or election cycle.

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APPENDIX

Ethnic Media Fellows

Chi Zhang is an independent researcher with expertise in immigrant integration, ethnic media, and local media ecosystems. She received her doctorate from the USC Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism. As a Research Fellow at the Tow Center for Digital Journalism, she examined the nature of political misinformation in the immigrant Chinese media ecosystem, and the study has been featured in the Atlantic, the New Yorker, and NBC, among others.

Faisal Tbeileh is a teacher and writer. He holds a Ph.D in Political Science from UCLA.

Hazel Trice Edney is an award winning veteran journalist and editor/publisher of the Trice Edney News Wire, the only African-American-owned news wire service credentialed by the U.S. House and Senate Periodicals Press Galleries. She holds a master's degree in public administration with a concentration in press, politics and public policy from the Harvard University John F. Kennedy School of Government.

Jongwon Lee received B.A from Korea University and J.D from Georgia State University College of Law. Prior to law school, he worked for Kyunghyang Daily News in Seoul, South Korea, and the Korea Daily in Atlanta, Georgia. He grew up in Paju, South Korea, and immigrated to the US when he was 30. He is interested in immigration, tax laws, public policy, and North Korean laws.

Mariela Santos-Muñiz is a freelance journalist, and part-time Collaborative journalism newsletter and database coordinator at the Center for Cooperative Media. Her writing has appeared at Nylon, The Daily Dot, Book Riot, and more. She holds an M.A. in International Relations and International Communications from Boston University.

Oni Advincula is a New York City-based journalist and media consultant. He has nearly 20 years of experience working in the ethnic media sector. A former correspondent for The Jersey Journal, editor of The Filipino Express, and the national media director of New America Media, Oni was a recipient of a number of journalism fellowships, including the New York Times Foreign Press Fellowship, National Health Journalism Fellowship, and Metcalf Institute for Marine and Environmental Reporting. Oni attended University of the Philippines, Harvard University, and Columbia University, where he was awarded a Charles H. Revson Fellowship and received his master's degrees in public administration and journalism.

Pilar Marrero is a journalist and author with long experience in covering social and political issues of the Latino community in the United States. Her book, Killing the American Dream, was published in 2012 by Pallgrave McMillan and in Spanish by Penguin Books. She is associate editor of Ethnic Media Services and Consulting Producer of the PBS documentary: "187, the Rise of the Latino Vote."

Rong Xiaoqing is a reporter for the Chinese language Sing Tao Daily in New York, and an Alicia Patterson Fellow (2019). She writes for various English and Chinese language publications in the U.S. and China. Her articles appeared in Foreign Policy, the National Review, The New York Times, the New York Daily News, the South China Morning Post and China Newsweek, among other publications. She writes a few columns for various publications in China. Rong has won multiple awards from the Society of Professional Journalists, CUNY J-School and New America Media. She was the first reporter from a non-English language media to win an award from the Deadline Club. She was a grant recipient of the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, the Fund for Investigative Journalism and the California Health Endowment.

Vidya Pradhan is a freelance writer with an abiding interest in American politics. She has previously been editor of India Currents, the leading South Asian magazine in the west coast. She is learning Carnatic music and enjoys crossword puzzles.

Resulting Coverage: News Stories

Rong Xiaoqing, "Trump patronizes Chinese restaurants, fake news, Chinese circles go viral." Sing Tao Daily, February 23, 2020.

Rong Xiaoqing, "City Census Office clarified that filling in the questionnaire is not closed." Sing Tao Daily, April 1, 2020.

Jongwon Lee, "Debunking "Department of Home Affairs" Hoax - Census Bureau Confirms No Actual Case of Census Worker "Imposter"." (English version.) Ethnic Media Services, June 2020.

Jongwon Lee, "Census employee impersonation." Korea Times Chicago, June 23, 2020.

Jongwon Lee, "Census Bureau. Census employee impersonation robbery unfounded." SF Korean, June 23, 2020.

Jongwon Lee, "Census Bureau. Census employee impersonation robbery unfounded." LV Korean, June 23, 2020.

Jongwon Lee, "Census Bureau. Census employee impersonation robbery unfounded." LA Korean, June 23, 2020.

Jongwon Lee, "Census employee impersonation robbery unfounded." The KR Media Chicago (Kyocharo Chicago), June 23, 2020.

Kim Gyu-young, sharing reporting from Jongwon Lee, "Census Bureau, robbers impersonating employees It's just a rumor, no incident has been reported It's just a rumor, no incident has been reported." Korea Times Atlanta, June 24, 2020.

Heogyeom, sharing reporting from Jongwon Lee, "Census agent impersonation robbery SNS is rumored" -Federal government official position announced." The Korean News, June 24, 2020.

Kwon Soon-woo, sharing reporting from Jongwon Lee, "Census employee impersonation robbery, factless." The Korea Daily Atlanta, June 25, 2020.

Jongwon Lee, "Census employee impersonation robbery warning 'fact unfounded'." The Korean Journal Houston, June 25, 2020.

Kim Eon-jung, sharing reporting from Jongwon Lee, "Census employee impersonation robbery unfounded." Atlanta Chosun Daily, June 26, 2020.

Jongwon Lee, "Census employee impersonation robbery 'no work'." The Korea Times New York, July 1, 2020.

Jongwon Lee, "Census employee impersonation robbery 'no work'." The Korea Times San Francisco, July 1, 2020.

James Lee, sharing reporting from Jongwon Lee, "The census employee impersonation robbery is untrue." The Korea Daily Chicago, July 1, 2020.

Hazel Trice Edny, "2010 Census Omitted 3.7 Million Blacks – Nearly Five Times Its Original 'Undercount' Claims." Houston Forward Times, July 8, 2020.

Hazel Trice Edny, "2010 Census omitted 3.7 million Blacks—nearly five times original undercount claims." New York Amsterdam News, July 23, 2020.

Vidya Pradhan, "Voting in California in November 2020 – Your Questions Answered." India West, September 10, 2020.

Hazel Trice Edny, "Gold-Star Family; Other White House Guests May Have Been Put In Harm's Way By Trump." The Seattle Medium, October 7, 2020.

Pilar Marrero, "Not All Is Lost After Census Count Stops, Civil Rights Advocates Say." Ethnic Media Services, October 14, 2020.

Pilar Marrero, "The Most Problematic "Fake News" Are Not Complete Falsehoods." Ethnic Media Services, October 21, 2020.

Jongwon Lee, "The most dangerous "fake news" doesn't have to be 100% lying." Ethnic Media Services, October 23, 2020.

Jongwon Lee, "The most dangerous "fake news" doesn't have to be 100% lying." The Korean News, November 30, 2020.

Resulting Coverage: Selection of Inoculation Messaging

Pilar Marrero	Wrote an inoculation message via a Facebook post on coronavirus symptoms here	Coronavirus
Jongwon Lee	Responded to a message on KakaoTalk propagating the Home Affairs Hoax that there is no Department of Home Affairs and provided the link to the U.S. Census Bureau's Rumours page on the Home Affairs Hoax	Census
Pilar Marrero	Wrote a Facebook post about misinformation on stimulus checks and hair dryers preventing coronavirus. See the post here	Coronavirus
Pilar Marrero	Wrote a Facebook post explaining why conspiracy theories are problematic and linking to an article describing how conspiracy theories can be public health hazards. See the post here	Coronavirus
Pilar Marrero	Wrote a Facebook post about the actual number of people dead from coronavirus. See the post here	Coronavirus
Pilar Marrero	Wrote a Facebook post to debunk hoax that sex kills coronavirus here	Coronavirus
Pilar Marrero	Wrote a Facebook post explaining why conspiracy theories on coronavirus are problematic here and gave an example in Spanish of a conspiracy theory that coronavirus was made by China and the vaccine will include a microchip in another (follow-up) Facebook post here	Coronavirus
Pilar Marrero	Wrote Facebook post debunking content about Bill Gates and vaccines here	Coronavirus
Pilar Marrero	Wrote a Facebook post about a tweet from Russia claiming coronavirus is a germ designed to incapacitate and kill. See the post here	Coronavirus
Vidya Pradhan	Wrote an inoculation message via a Facebook post on the Plandemic here	Coronavirus
Jongwon Lee	Clarified confusion surrounding the Census to Korean community members in Georgia while volunteering to give out care packages/ supplies during the weekend of May 16. The Korean community members had either thought the Census was over on April 1 or paused due to COVID-19.	Census
Jongwon Lee	Clarified confusion surrounding the Census to Korean community members in Georgia again while volunteering to give out care packages/ supplies during the weekend of May 23. The Korean community members had either thought the Census was over on April 1 or paused due to COVID-19.	Census
Pilar Marrero	Responded to a tweet that links Biden to pedophilia	Elections
Jongwon Lee	Responded to a question on KakaoTalk on whether international students should still fill out the census, given Trump's recent immigration policies on their visas.	Census
Jongwon Lee	Responded to confusion of Koreans unsure about whether foreign nationals could fill out the Census in KakaoTalk. He explains why they can and should fill out the census. He also provides links to the 2020 Census, instructions, and a video from the Census Bureau all in the Korean language so that the Korean individuals can get the help they need to fill out the census.	Census

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