Module 4 (Part 4)

Building Digital Bridges:
Media's Power in Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion

Developed by Laura Magan, MMS, Ireland

www.**includememedia**.eu

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M4 Part 4 – Focus Area 4

The Role of Citizen Journalism in Strengthening Social Cohesion

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Module 4
Building Digital Bridges: Media's Power in Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion

This Module explores how digital media can contribute to conflict resolution, reconciliation, and facilitate social unity. It highlights the role of storytelling, journalism, and digital platforms in peacebuilding efforts across Europe.

MODULE 4 (Part 1)
Topic 1

Digital Media as a Tool for Post-Conflict Reconciliation in Europe

*Examines how digital platforms help communities **heal from conflict, rebuild trust, and promote dialogue** to support long-term peace and cooperation.*

MODULE 4 (Part 2)
Topic 2

Storytelling for Social Change: Using Digital Media to Promote Peace Initiatives

*Highlights the power of **narrative-driven content** in reshaping perspectives, reducing tensions, and promoting mutual understanding.*

MODULE 4 (Part 3)
Topic 3

European Digital Platforms Supporting Peace Journalism and Constructive Dialogue

*Analyses digital tools and media initiatives that **combat misinformation, encourage balanced reporting, and facilitate respectful conversations**.*

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MODULE 4 (Part 4)
Topic 4

The Role of Citizen Journalism in Strengthening Social Cohesion

*Explores how grassroots journalism and community-driven reporting **amplify marginalised voices and promote shared narratives** for a more unified society.*

Module 4 Snapshot

Focus Area: Peace Building in Communities

Aim: How Digital Media Supports Peace and Understanding in European Communities

Emphasises how storytelling and citizen journalism can facilitate peacebuilding and promote **post-conflict recovery** and **social change.** It teaches how digital media can be used as a tool for **empowering communities** in **peacebuilding,** to heal, connect and promote **peace reconciliation**, and **social cohesion** through **inclusive narratives** and **citizen participation.**

Key Words: Post-Conflict Reconciliation, Peacebuilding, Reconciliation, Social Cohesion, Storytelling for Social Change, Promoting Peace, Citizen Journalism, Constructive Dialogue, Post Conflict Recovery, Community Engagement.

Module Overview

This module explores how digital media contributes to conflict resolution, reconciliation, and facilitating social unity. It highlights the role of storytelling, journalism, and digital platforms in peacebuilding efforts across Europe.

Participants will examine how digital storytelling, online discourse, and media initiatives support post-conflict reconciliation, bridge social divides, and promote constructive dialogue.

Through case studies, ethical discussions, and interactive exercises, learners will develop skills to leverage digital media as a tool for promoting peace and social cohesion in diverse communities.

Module 4 (4 Focus Areas)

01

Digital Media as a Tool for Post-Conflict Reconciliation in Europe
*Examines how digital platforms help communities **heal from conflict, rebuild trust, and promote dialogue** to support long-term peace and cooperation.*

02

Storytelling for Social Change: Using Digital Media to Promote Peace Initiatives
*Highlights the power of **narrative-driven content** in reshaping perspectives, reducing tensions, and promoting mutual understanding.*

03

European Digital Platforms Supporting Peace Journalism and Constructive Dialogue
*Analyses digital tools and media initiatives that **combat misinformation, encourage balanced reporting, and facilitate respectful conversations**.*

YOU ARE HERE

04

The Role of Citizen Journalism in Strengthening Social Cohesion
*Explores how grassroots journalism and community-driven reporting **amplify marginalised voices and promote shared narratives** for a more unified society.*

C O N T E N T S

Module 4: Building Digital Bridges: Media's Power in Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion

Module 4 (Part 4) Interactive Learning Elements

102 Slides

04 Exercises

05 Videos

04 Case Studies

9 Digital Tools

11 Toolkits & Guides

7 Articles & Reports

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Learning Outcomes

Topic 1: Digital Media as a Tool for Post-Conflict Reconciliation in Europe

→ Examine how digital platforms help **communities heal from conflict, rebuild trust**, enable and engage in dialogue to support long-term peace and cooperation.

→ Understand the role of digital media in **reconciliation efforts** and **truth-telling initiatives**.

→ Identify challenges in using digital media for **post-conflict recovery**, including polarisation, misinformation, and media manipulation.

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Learning Outcomes

Topic 2: **Storytelling for Social Change: Using Digital Media to Promote Peace Initiatives**

→ Analyse the power of **narrative-driven content** in reshaping perspectives and promoting mutual understanding.

→ Explore digital storytelling techniques used to **highlight reconciliation efforts** and **peacebuilding projects.**

→ Understand the **ethical considerations** in storytelling for conflict resolution and social cohesion.

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Learning Outcomes

Topic 3: **European Digital Platforms Supporting Peace Journalism and Constructive Dialogue**

→ Examine digital tools and initiatives that **support peace journalism and conflict-sensitive reporting.**

→ Investigate the role of online platforms in **facilitating dialogue between divided communities**.

→ Explore case studies of **European media projects** focused on promoting **understanding and preventing violence.**

Learning Outcomes

Topic 4: The Role of Social Media in Conflict Prevention and Resolution

→ Analyses how social media platforms influence **public discourse during conflicts** and **peace processes.**

→ Investigate the impact of **online activism and grassroots digital campaigns** in promoting peace.

→ Learn strategies to **counteract online hate speech and digital propaganda** that fuel conflicts.

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Topic 4

The Role of Citizen Journalism in Strengthening Social Cohesion

Overview

The Role of Citizen Journalism in Strengthening Social Cohesion

With the rise of social media and mobile technology, **citizen journalism** has become a vital tool for **amplifying diverse voices** and **countering mainstream media biases**. This section examines how **grassroots reporting** promotes and encourages social cohesion, holds institutions accountable, and provides **alternative narratives that contribute to peacebuilding.**

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Key Definitions and Concepts
Citizen Journalism Strengthens Social Cohesion

➤ **Citizen Journalism vs. Traditional Media:** Strengths, challenges, and impact.

➤ **Fact-Checking & Misinformation Prevention:** Ensuring credibility in grassroots reporting.

➤ **Digital Security & Ethical Reporting:** Protecting journalists and sources.

➤ **Community-Led Media Projects:** Case studies of citizen journalism initiatives strengthening social cohesion.

CONCEPT Citizen Journalism vs. Traditional Media: Strengths, challenges, and impact.

IMPORTANCE Blending citizen and traditional media creates a fuller, more democratic media landscape that supports truth-telling and community empowerment.

DEFINITION Citizen journalism refers to reporting done by ordinary individuals — often using smartphones, blogs, or social media — outside of institutional newsrooms. Traditional media involves

EXAMPLE The Syria Tracker Project documented real-time civilian reports during the conflict in Syria, when international press couldn't access certain areas.

professional journalists working under established news organisations with formal editorial oversight. Strengths include fast, raw and direct from the source and builds local trust.

CONCEPT Fact-Checking & Misinformation Prevention: Ensuring credibility in grassroots reporting.

IMPORTANCE In fragile peacebuilding contexts, falsehoods can escalate tensions—fact-checking promotes trust, stability, and informed action.

DEFINITION Fact-checking verifies claims made in media and public discourse. It's essential for preventing false information from spreading, particularly in conflict-sensitive or fast-moving situations.

EXAMPLE The Démagog initiative in Poland trains youth to spot fake headlines, manipulated videos, and emotional misinformation across TikTok and Instagram.

Use tools like TinEye or Google Reverse Image Search to check visual content. Use sites like EU vs Disinfo, StopFake.org or FactCheck.org

CONCEPT Digital Security & Ethical Reporting: Protecting journalists and sources. Best practices for journalists and content creators.

IMPORTANCE Citizen reporters are often first on the scene. Ensuring their safety and ethical standards protects lives and the credibility of peace journalism.

DEFINITION Digital security means protecting personal data, communications, and identities — particularly critical for journalists working in repressive or risky environments. Ethical reporting includes responsible handling of sensitive content.

EXAMPLE Witness trains activists globally to film human rights abuses safely, guiding them on consent, storage, and how to avoid endangering victims.

Use encrypted messaging Apps (e.g., Signal). Blur faces or names in sensitive conflict photos. Store files securely (e.g., Tails OS or encrypted USBs)
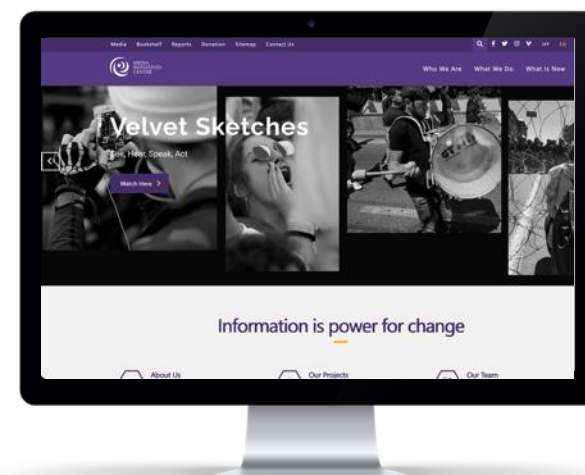
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CONCEPT Community-Led Media Projects: Case studies of citizen journalism initiatives strengthening social cohesion.

IMPORTANCE When communities tell their own stories, they reclaim identity, promote dignity, and break cycles of fear and marginalisation — promoting and enabling resilience and unity.

DEFINITION Community-led media refers to grassroots initiatives where locals produce and share content relevant to their lives — often as a tool for inclusion, advocacy, and social cohesion.

EXAMPLE Media Initiatives Center (Armenia): Supports youth from opposing ethnic groups to co-create peace videos and animations

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Citizen journalism as a tool for community-driven storytelling and truth-telling.

What is citizen journalism?

Citizen journalism refers to the **act of everyday people (non-professional reporters)** using digital tools, like smartphones, blogs, or social media, to report news, document events, or share stories from their own communities.

It democratises media production and **puts storytelling power in the hands of people closest to the issues.**

This grassroots approach **empowers communities** to share their narratives, particularly in areas where mainstream media may be absent or biased.

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Focus Area 1

Building Digital Bridges:
Media's Power in Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion

Citizen journalism as a tool for community-driven storytelling and truth-telling.

Citizen journalists document untold stories, providing local perspectives on conflicts and social issues.

As defined by **Jay Rosen**, it's "when the people formerly known as the audience employ the press tools they have in their possession to inform one another."

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizen_journalism

Why it Matters. Citizen journalism as a tool for community-driven storytelling and truth-telling

→ **Amplifying Marginalised Voices:** Provides a platform for underrepresented groups to share their experiences and perspectives.

→ **Countering Misinformation:** Offers firsthand accounts that challenge false narratives and promote factual reporting.

→ **Enabling Empathy and Understanding:** Personal stories humanise complex issues, bridging divides and promoting social cohesion.

→ **Documenting Human Rights Violations:** Serves as a tool for accountability by recording and exposing injustices.

Case Study: The Rise of Citizen Journalism

The Rise of Citizen Journalism: A discussion on the growth of citizen journalism and its role in today's digital landscape. A deep dive on Fake or Fact – You Decide with Galway Bay FM, Ireland, where we discuss the rise of citizen journalism, the blurred lines with influencers, and the real threat to democracy when journalism loses its independence. The voice of trained journalists must get louder, especially in today's social media landscape.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTEr5zIsU6o
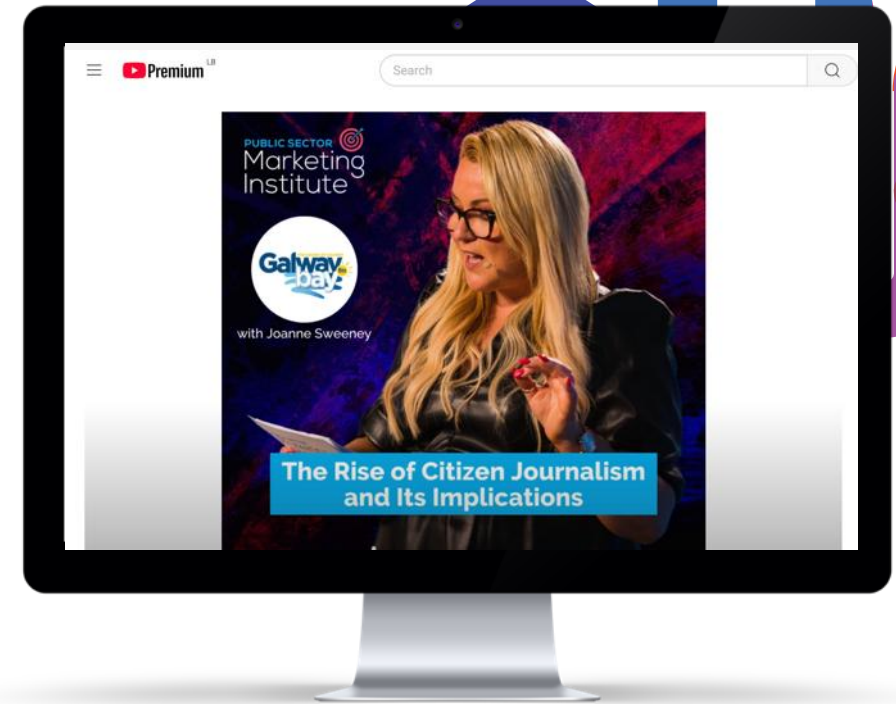
The rise of citizen journalism

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The Evolution and Impact of Citizen Journalism

The roots of citizen journalism can be traced back to the early days of the internet, when blogs and online forums first gave people a platform to share their thoughts and experiences. However, it was the advent of smartphones and social media that truly democratised news reporting. With a smartphone in hand, anyone can capture and share news events as they unfold, often reaching a global audience within minutes.

Real-Time Reporting: One of the most significant advantages of citizen journalism is its ability to provide real-time updates. Traditional media outlets often rely on scheduled news cycles, but citizen journalists can report news as it happens, providing immediate coverage of breaking events.

Diverse Perspectives: Citizen journalism brings a diversity of voices and perspectives to the news landscape. It allows marginalised and underrepresented communities to tell their own stories, highlighting issues that may be overlooked by mainstream media.

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The Evolution and Impact of Citizen Journalism

Increased Accountability: Citizen journalists often serve as watchdogs, holding authorities and institutions accountable. With the ability to capture and share evidence instantly, they can expose corruption, injustice, and wrongdoing.

Supplementing Traditional Media: Citizen journalism complements traditional media by providing additional sources of information and on-the-ground insights. This collaborative approach can enhance the overall quality and breadth of news coverage.

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Applying Digital Media. Citizen journalism as a tool for community-driven storytelling and truth-telling.

As you can see from the examples, digital media platforms can be leveraged to promote peace by:

Facilitating Dialogue: Creating spaces for open communication betweenconflicting parties.

Promoting Understanding: Sharing stories that highlight commonalities and engage empathy.

Mobilising Communities: Organising campaigns and initiatives that encourage collective action towards peace.

Applying Digital Media. Citizen journalism as a tool for community-driven storytelling and truth-telling.

Other ways you can do it:

Social Media Campaigns: Utilise platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to spread messages of peace and counteract hate speech.

Digital Storytelling: Encourage individuals to share personal narratives that promote reconciliation and understanding on YouTube, TikTok or Reels.

Online Workshops and Webinars: Conduct virtual sessions delivered by marginalised individuals in your community to educate and engage communities in peacebuilding efforts.

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The Role

of Digital Media and Technology

The Rise of Citizen Journalism: Reporting the News from the Ground Up

1 **Smartphones:** The widespread availability of smartphones equipped with high-quality cameras allows anyone to capture and share newsworthy moments instantly.

2 **Social Media:** Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram provide the infrastructure for citizen journalists to disseminate information to a broad audience quickly. Hashtags and trending topics help amplify these stories.

3 **Live Streaming:** Live streaming services, such as Facebook Live, YouTube Live, and Periscope, enable real-time broadcasting of events, providing an unfiltered view of unfolding news.

4 **Blogging Platforms:** Websites like WordPress and Medium offer easy-to-use platforms for individuals to publish their reports and analyses, reaching a global readership without the need for traditional media channels.

Challenges

of Citizen Journalism

While citizen journalism has many advantages, it also faces several challenges:

1 **Credibility and Verification:** One of the biggest challenges is ensuring the accuracy and credibility of the information. Without the rigorous fact-checking processes of traditional media, false or misleading information can easily spread.

2 **Ethical Considerations:** Citizen journalists may not always adhere to the ethical standards and practices followed by professional journalists. This can lead to issues such as invasion of privacy, biased reporting, and sensationalism.

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Challenges

of Citizen Journalism

3 **Safety and Security:** Reporting on sensitive or dangerous topics can put citizen journalists at risk. They may face harassment, threats, or legal repercussions for their activities.

4 **Sustainability:** Unlike professional journalists, citizen journalists often lack the financial support and resources needed to sustain their reporting efforts over the long term.

The Rise of Citizen Journalism: Reporting the News from the Ground Up

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The Intersection

with Traditional Media

The relationship between citizen journalism and traditional media is complex and evolving. While there are tensions and competition, there are also opportunities for collaboration:

1 **Complementary Reporting:** Traditional media can collaborate with citizen journalists to provide more comprehensive coverage. Citizen journalists offer on-the-ground perspectives, while traditional media provide the context, analysis, and verification.

2 **Crowdsourcing Information:** Media outlets increasingly use crowdsourcing to gather information and content from citizen journalists. This approach allows them to cover more ground and access a wider range of sources.

The Intersection

with Traditional Media

3

Amplifying Voices: Traditional media can amplify the voices of citizen journalists, bringing their stories to a larger audience. This collaboration can help ensure that important issues receive the attention they deserve.

4

Training and Support: Some media organisations offer training and support to citizen journalists, helping them develop their skills and adhere to journalistic standards. This can enhance the quality and credibility of citizen journalism.

The Rise of Citizen Journalism: Reporting the News from the Ground Up

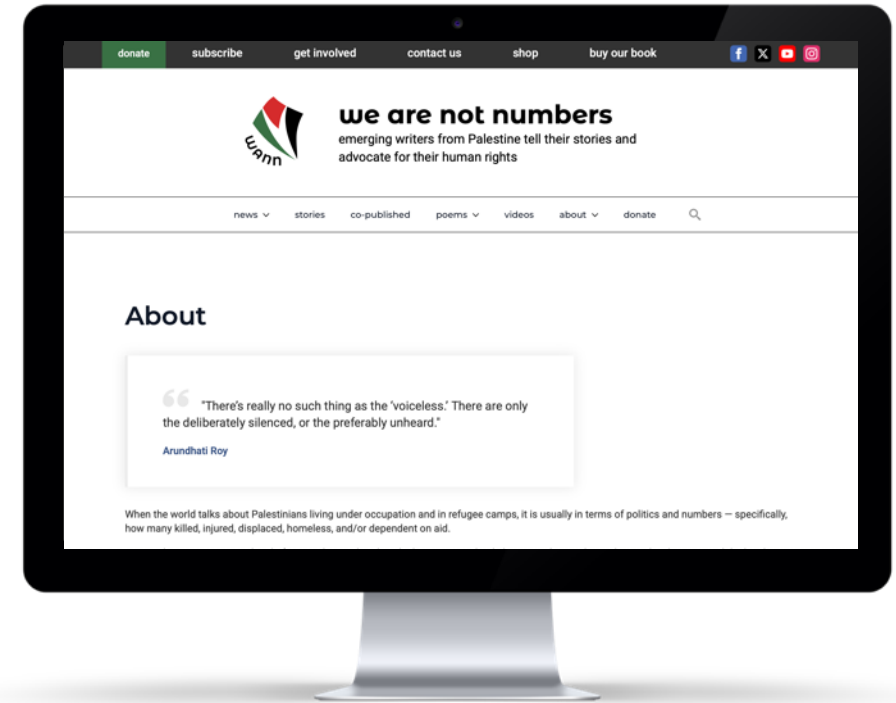# Real World Examples. Citizen journalism as a tool for community-driven storytelling and truth-telling.

we are not numbers
emerging writers from Palestine tell their stories and advocate for their human rights

We Are Not Numbers (Gaza): This project mentors young Palestinians to write and publish personal essays in English, sharing their daily experiences and challenges. It aims to humanise the Palestinian narrative and promote and enable global understanding.

https://wearenotnumbers.org/about/

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Real World Examples. Citizen journalism as a tool for community-driven storytelling and truth-telling.
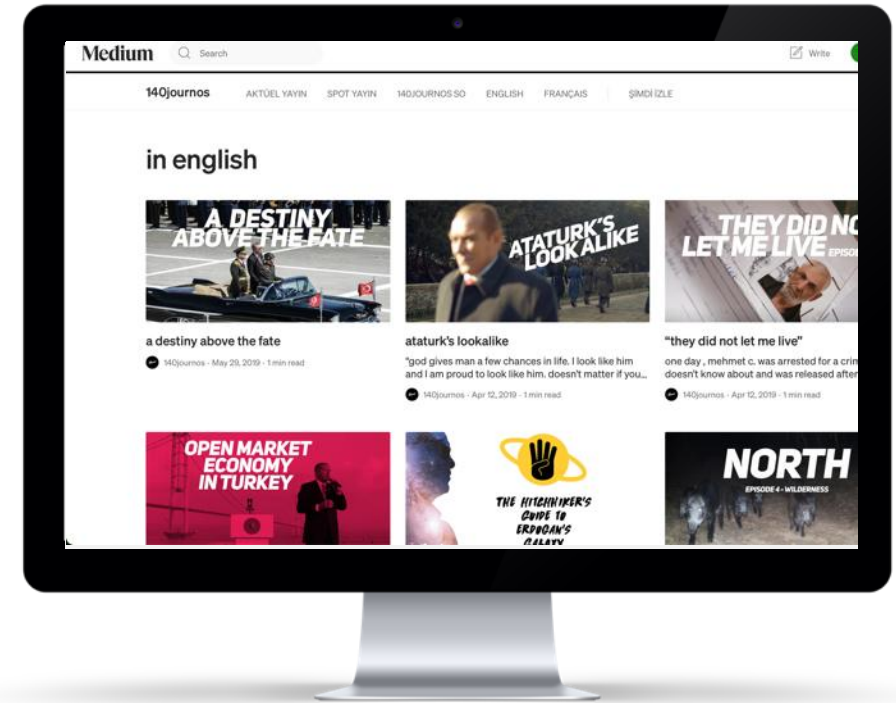
140journos (Turkey): Engin Önder is an Istanbul-based Turkish media publisher that produces and publishes visual stories, documentaries and qualified research. Founded in 2012, as a Twitter-based citizen journalism platform.

140journos in English: Revolutionising reporting in Turkey. How citizen journalists are using social platforms to fill the gap left by traditional media

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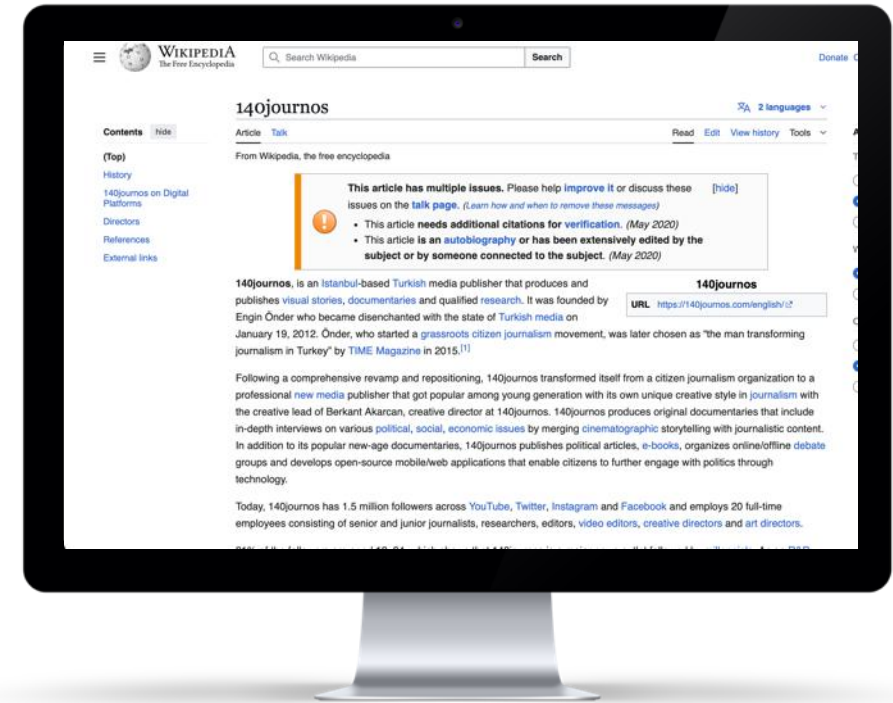# Real World Examples. Citizen journalism as a tool for community-driven storytelling and truth-telling.

Önder started this grassroots citizen journalism movement, it has now evolved into a multimedia outlet producing documentaries and in-depth reports, focusing on underreported stories in Turkey which was later chosen as "the man transforming journalism in Turkey" by TIME Magazine in 2015.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/140journos

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"There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless.' There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard."
Arundhati Roy

"Why do I die every morning / as if I wake only to be buried?"
Mariam Mohammed Al Khateeb
Gaza Strip

Ahmed Alnaouq and Pam Bailey

A GROUNDBREAKING COLLECTION OF ESSAYS FROM THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF PALESTINE
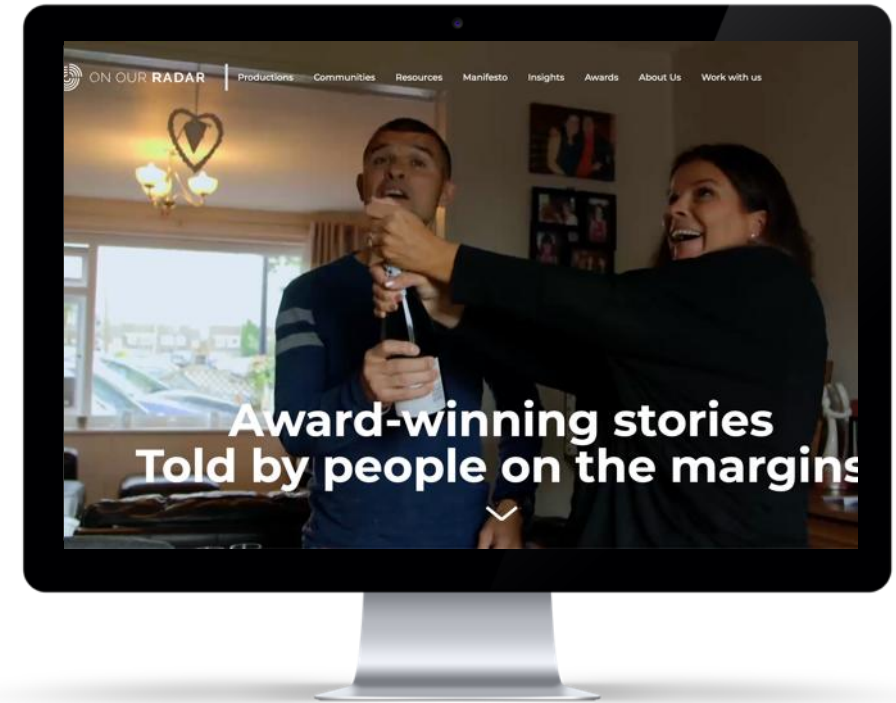
COMING APRIL 2025
PRE-ORDER NOW

WE ARE NOT NUMBERS
The Voices of Gaza's Youth

Real World Examples. Citizen journalism as a tool for community-driven storytelling and truth-telling.
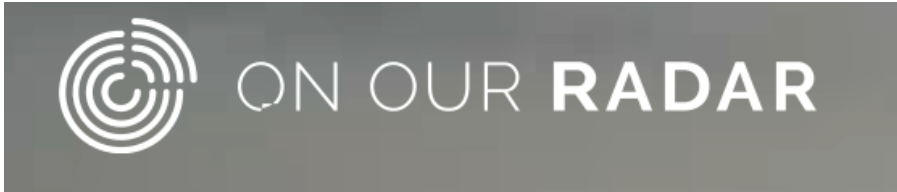
On Our Radar: A UK-based nonprofit that trains marginalised communities to share their stories through SMS and voice recordings. During the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone, they enabled real-time reporting from remote areas, providing authentic insights that mainstream media couldn't access.
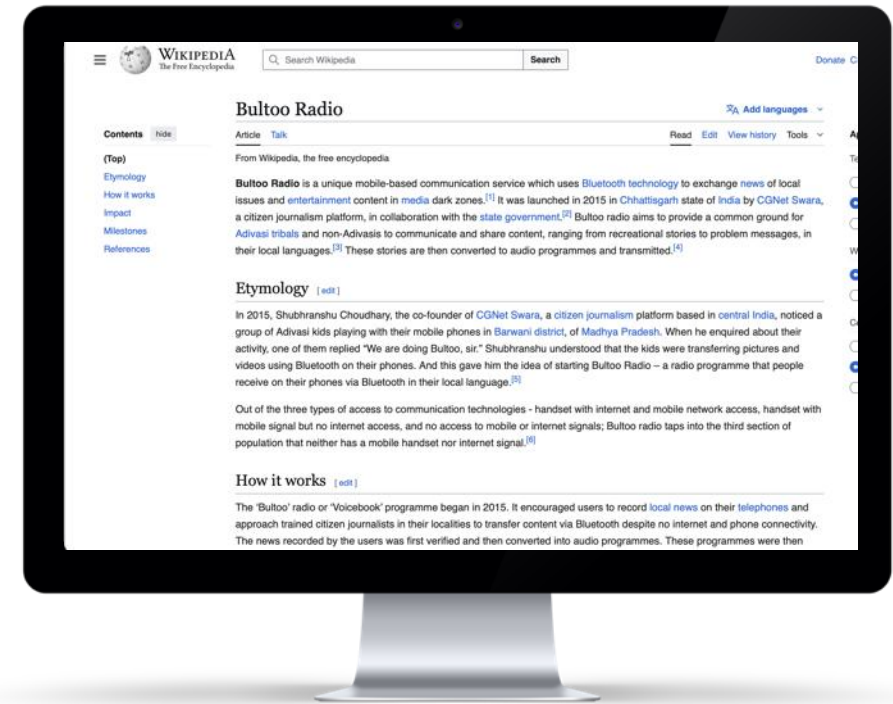
https://onourradar.org/

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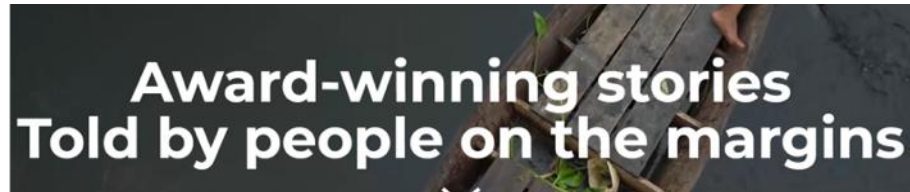# Real World Examples. Citizen journalism as a tool for community-driven storytelling and truth-telling.

Bultoo Radio (India): An initiative by CGNet Swara, Bultoo Radio uses Bluetooth technology to disseminate news and stories in media-dark zones of Chhattisgarh, India. It empowers tribal communities to share local issues and cultural narratives without relying on internet connectivity. This unique radio station acts as a vital lifeline, spreading information, enabling connection, and empowering these marginalised communities.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bultoo_Radio

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Real World Examples. Citizen journalism as a tool for community-driven storytelling and truth-telling.

Award-winning stories
Told by people on the margins

We are an award-winning media organisation, combining a participatory approach with the highest journalistic standards to produce stories that are distinct, raw and intimate. We work with people to tell their own stories, in their own words. Productions here.

ON OUR RADAR | Productions Communities Resources Manifesto Insights Awards About us Work with us

Productions

We are an award-winning production house supporting unheard communities to share stories from across the globe

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Real World Examples. Citizen journalism as a tool for community-driven storytelling and truth-telling.

Cultural Survival -Valasa Bultoo Radio: Indigenous Radio Station Gives Voice to India's Displaced Tribal Communities in India

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On Our Radar

Underpinning all of our work is a diagnostic tool called the 5Cs. There are five recurring barriers that marginalised communities around the world face when trying to share their insights and concerns. This framework offers a pathway for communities to identify and overcome those challenges and share their experiences with dignity and power.

Conviction

Do participants trust you? Are they on board with the aims of the project? Do they believe that speaking out will result in meaningful change?

Capacity

Do participants have the skills, access and resources required to report on a story safely, securely and accurately?

Craft

Do participants have the necessary technical skills to deliver media that is of broadcast quality or ready to be shared internationally on digital platforms?

Connectivity

Do participants have barriers to digital engagement and, if so, what tools are they using already to communicate?

Confidence

Where does the power come from to find your voice?

The Future

of Citizen Journalism

As technology continues to evolve, the future of citizen journalism looks promising. Several trends are likely to shape its development:

1 **Increased Integration with AI:** Artificial intelligence and machine learning can assist in verifying information, curating content, and detecting fake news. These technologies can enhance the credibility and efficiency of citizen journalism.

2 **Greater Collaboration:** We can expect more collaboration between citizen journalists and traditional media, leveraging the strengths of both to provide comprehensive and reliable news coverage.

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The Future

of Citizen Journalism

3 **Enhanced Tools and Platforms:** Continued innovation will lead to the development of more sophisticated tools and platforms for citizen journalists. This includes better mobile apps, enhanced live-streaming capabilities, and more user-friendly content management systems.

4 **Global Reach:** The global nature of the internet means that citizen journalism will continue to transcend borders, allowing people from different parts of the world to share their stories and perspectives.

5 **Emphasis on Training and Education:** There will be a greater focus on training and educating citizen journalists, ensuring they have the skills and knowledge needed to report accurately and ethically.

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WIKINEWS

Focus Area 2

Building Digital Bridges:
Media's Power in Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion

The impact of decentralised media on trust and information credibility.

Decentralised media refers to information platforms and content that are not controlled by a single gatekeeper, like a traditional news outlet or government, but instead come from many sources: individuals, grassroots groups, independent networks, and digital collectives. This includes platforms like blogs and vlogs, independent podcasts, decentralised social networks (e.g., Mastodon), citizen journalism platforms (e.g., Wikinews), blockchain-based or peer-to-peer media tools (e.g., Mirror.xyz, DTube)

Unlike mainstream media, decentralised news sources allow multiple perspectives, but they also require credibility checks. UNESCO: Media and Information Literacy in the Age of Disinformation, Open Knowledge Foundation – Participatory and Independent Journalism

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Why it Matters. The impact of decentralised media on trust and information credibility.

Expands Democratic Access to Voices & Amplifies Diverse Perspectives
Decentralised media allows *anyone* to publish, share, and report—especially voices left out of mainstream narratives (e.g. youth, minorities, activists).

**Challenges Monopolies on Truth and Narrative Framing**
It disrupts the narrative power held by traditional outlets, encouraging accountability and new perspectives.

BUT — Increases Risk of Misinformation – Lack Editorial Oversight
Without strong editorial or fact-checking mechanisms, false or manipulated content can spread easily. This can erode trust and fuel division.

Why it Matters. The impact of decentralised media on trust and information credibility.
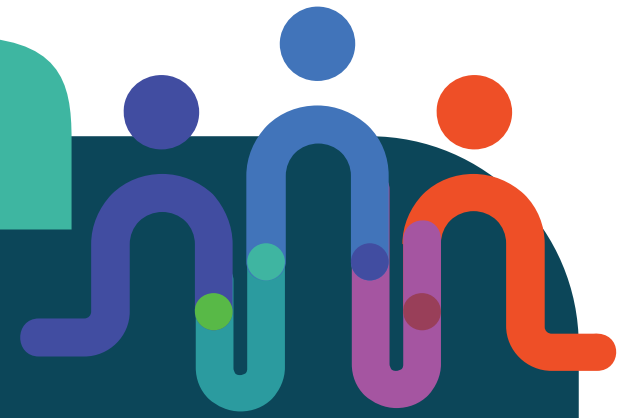
For mediation and peacebuilding, decentralised media opens up **inclusive digital storytelling** as a form of conflict prevention and recovery. Youth can become mediators of truth and trust by:

→Curating **credible community content**

→Using peer networks for **fact-checking**

→Promoting **digital literacy** in their schools or organisations

→Countering hate or bias with **counter-narratives**

Dual Impact on Peace and Credibility

Positive Potential

→ Enables **bottom-up storytelling** and digital peace activism

→ Strengthens community trust through localised media voices

→ Enables **resilience and solidarity** through hyper-local narratives

→ Supports rapid **mobilisation for peace or solidarity** campaigns

Challenges

→ No shared standards for **fact-checking** or **journalistic ethics**

→ Can **amplify conspiracy theories** or polarising rhetoric

→ Echo chambers form, reinforcing only one worldview

→ Increases difficulty in verifying **source credibility** in crisis settings

Examples: Tools & Platforms for Navigating Decentralised Media

Wikinews: Wikinews is a free-content news source where anyone can contribute, aiming to present reliable, unbiased, and relevant news. Community-led open-source news stories, following journalistic standards https://www.wikinews.org/
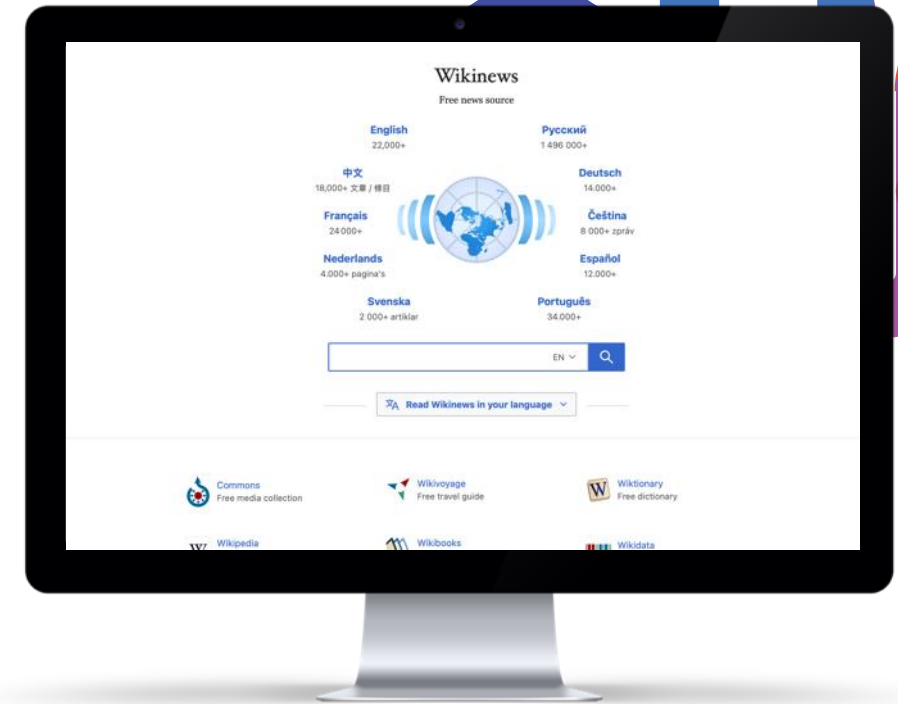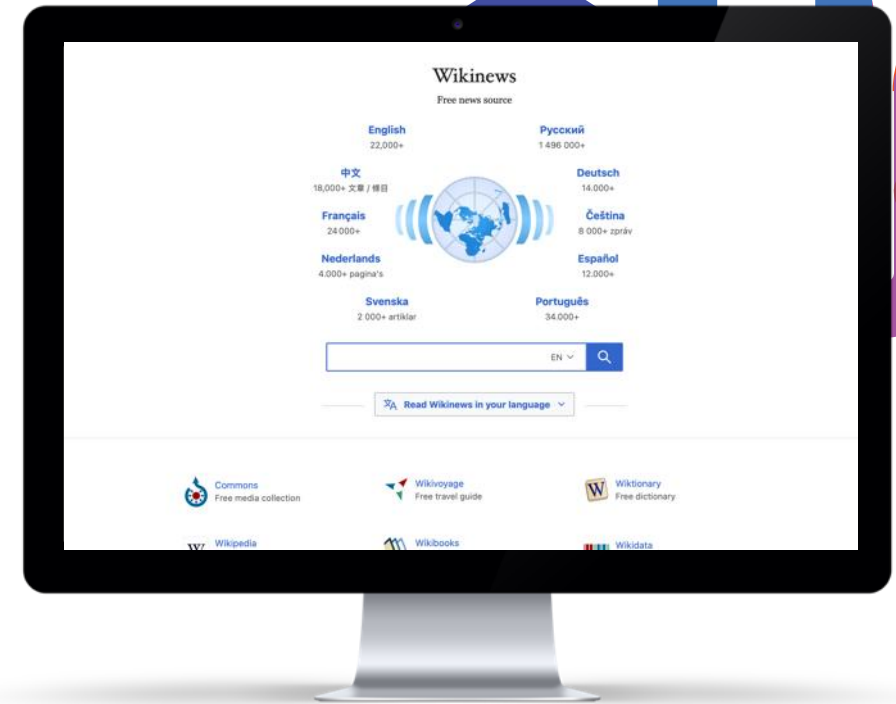
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Examples: Tools & Platforms for Navigating Decentralised Media

Open Participation: Allows citizens to write and edit news articles collaboratively.

Neutral Point of View: Strives for balanced reporting, adhering to strict editorial guidelines

Inclusive Storytelling: Gives a platform to diverse voices, promoting a more comprehensive understanding of events.

Community Engagement: Encourages public involvement in news creation, enabling media literacy and civic responsibility.
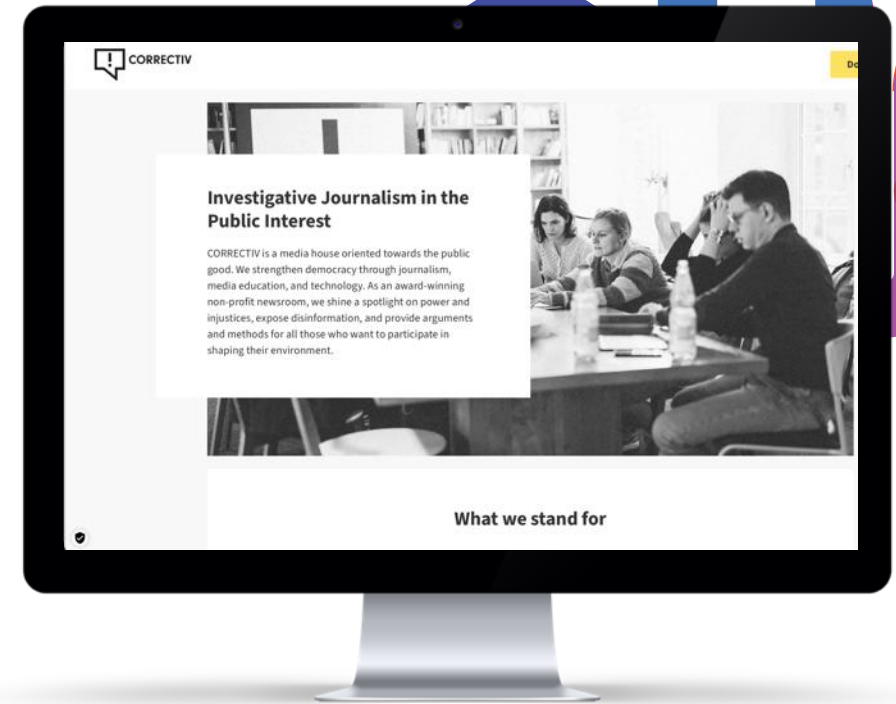
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Examples: Tools & Platforms for Navigating Decentralised Media

Spotlight by CORRECTIV. Enables citizens to investigate local misinformation collaboratively.

Brings together European media outlets and journalists to strengthen local journalism through data-driven reporting, capacity building and community-focused technology. https://correctiv.org/en/

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Examples: Tools & Platforms for Navigating Decentralised Media

EU Disinfo Lab. A vibrant home for disinformation activists and experts. Tracks fake news and coordinated information attacks in Europe. https://www.disinfo.eu/

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As an independent non-profit organisation, EU DisinfoLab gathers knowledge and expertise on disinformation in Europe. Through putting together research, investigative work and policy acumen, EU DisinfoLab is an active member of, and supports, a passionate and vast community that helps to detect, tackle, and prevent information disorders endangering citizens' integrity, peaceful coexistence and democratic values.

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Case Study: EU DisinfoLab Fighting Disinformation

On 2 June 2020, EU DisinfoLab held a webinar with Guillaume and Tim from Journalistes Solidaires where they detailed how they set up a spontaneous and innovative open newsroom born to fight COVID-19 disinformation.

EU DisinfoLab is an independent non-profit organisation focused on **tackling sophisticated disinformation campaigns targeting the EU,** its member states, core institutions, and core values. Its mission is to **raise awareness on disinformation** and contribute to a **better information landscape**.

How to build a decentralised fact checking operation in no time with Journalistes Solidaires
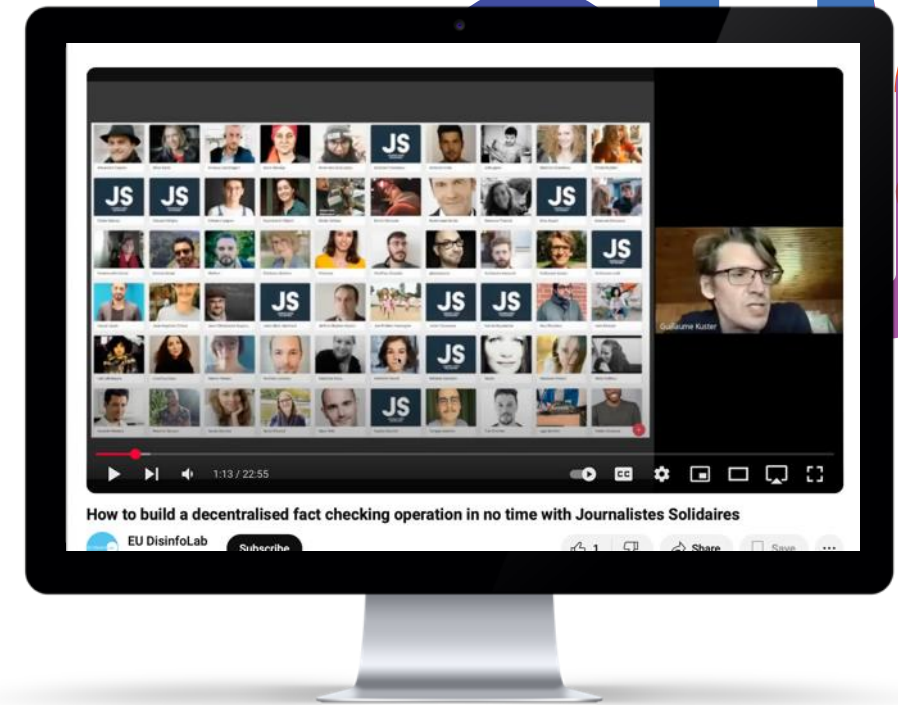
EU DisinfoLab

Click To Watch

Case Study: EU DisinfoLab Fighting Disinformation

EU DisinfoLab's **regular webinars** bring emerging research and ideas to the forefront to encourage cross-disciplinary collaboration and ensure that our community is up-to-date with critical developments in the field.
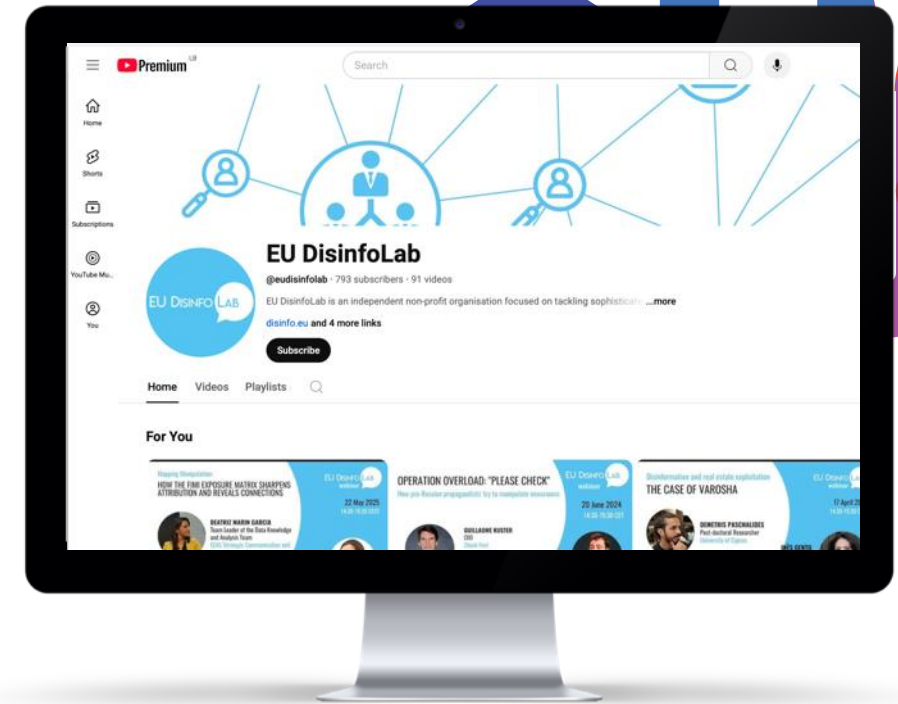
EU DisinfoLab – You Tube

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Ethical considerations and challenges in grassroots reporting.

Grassroots reporting—often led by citizen journalists, activists, or local youth—can powerfully amplify community voices, expose injustice, and spark change. But because it's usually informal, under-resourced, and emotionally close to the issue, it also presents ethical risks and dilemmas. Citizen journalists face risks related to misinformation, privacy concerns, and political pressure.

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Ethical considerations and challenges in grassroots reporting.

forbidden | stories

Focus Area 3

Building Digital Bridges:
Media's Power in Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion

What Does Ethics Mean in Grassroots Journalism? Ethical grassroots reporting means sharing stories in a way that is accurate, respectful, safe, and socially responsible. It includes telling the truth without causing harm, respecting privacy, especially in conflict zones, avoiding bias, hate speech, or manipulation and ensuring the dignity of the people being reported on

Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN) – Ethics Guide

Ethical Journalism Network – 5 Core Principles

Internews – Local Media for Peace Toolkit

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Why it Matters. Ethical Considerations & Challenges

CHALLENGE Informed Consent

WHY IT MATTERS Vulnerable groups may be **unaware of how their story will be shared**

EXAMPLE Interviewing a refugee without explaining online exposure

CHALLENGE Privacy vs. Public Interest

WHY IT MATTERS Revealing personal details may **endanger individuals** or communities

EXAMPLE Posting photos of protestors in a repressive regime

Why it Matters. Ethical Considerations & Challenges

CHALLENGE Bias & Activism Tension

WHY IT MATTERS Storytellers may **unconsciously frame stories** to support their own cause

EXAMPLE Only showing one side of a conflict to drive sympathy

CHALLENGE Fact-Checking & Verification

WHY IT MATTERS Misinformation can spread quickly and **harm reputations**

EXAMPLE Reporting a rumour as fact because it supports the narrative

Why it Matters. Ethical Considerations & Challenges

CHALLENGE Power Dynamics

WHY IT MATTERS Outsiders telling others' stories can **reinforce inequality**

EXAMPLE A foreign volunteer making a video about a local tragedy without community input

Example Solutions to Ethical Considerations & Challenges

➡ **CONSIDERATIONS Consent and Protection**

➡ **CHALLENGES WITH SOLUTIONS**

→ **Challenge**: Interviewees may not fully understand how their stories will be used online or may feel pressured to share sensitive experiences.

→ **Solution**: Use Verbal & written consent templates. **Informed consent protocols**, provide examples of where their story might appear, and allow withdrawal at any stage. Use **WITNESS Ethical Interview Checklist**

➡ **EXAMPLE** A Roma youth project in Slovakia includes a pre-recording workshop to discuss digital risks and data ownership before filming any testimony.

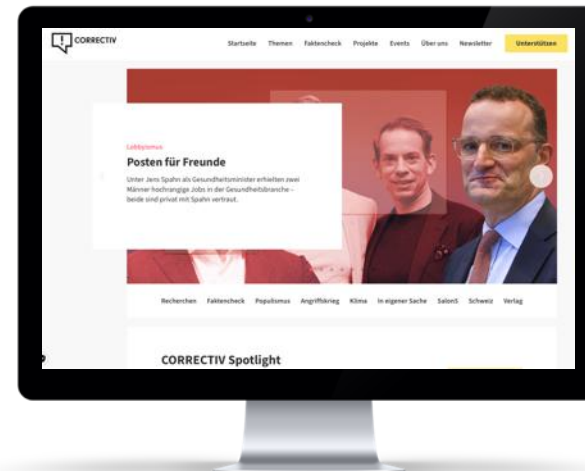# Example Solutions to Ethical Considerations & Challenges

CONSIDERATIONS Accuracy and Verification

CHALLENGES WITH SOLUTIONS

→ **Challenge**: Grassroots reporters may unintentionally spread misinformation due to lack of formal training or reliance on hearsay.

→ **Solution**: Learn **basic fact-checking**, cross-verification, and sourcing. Or use peer fact-checking groups. Use platforms like Spotlight or Correctiv for collaborative verification models.
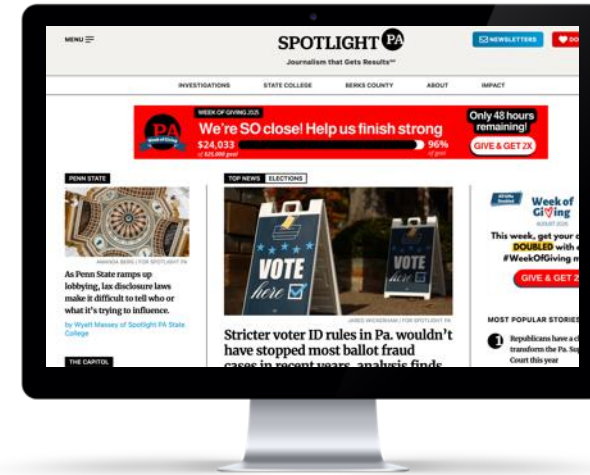
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Example Solutions to Ethical Considerations & Challenges

CONSIDERATIONS Representation Without Exploitation

CHALLENGES WITH SOLUTIONS

→ **Challenge**: Stories may reinforce stereotypes or "poverty porn" if not told with dignity and care.

→ **Solution**: Encourage **participatory storytelling** that gives people agency to shape their narrative. Use eyeWitness to Atrocities App and help you make your make your footage a powerful tool for justice the right way.

EXAMPLE Witness.org provides ethical storytelling toolkits for citizen reporters documenting human rights abuses.

Example Solutions to Ethical Considerations & Challenges

CONSIDERATIONS Safety and Reprisals

CHALLENGES WITH SOLUTIONS

→ **Challenge**: Reporting on injustice, war, or corruption can expose citizen journalists to harassment, violence, or legal threats.

→ **Solution**: Use anonymity, encryption, and protective networks like Forbidden Stories, which continue the work of threatened or murdered journalists. Use anonymity, VPN use, digital security training.

EXAMPLE CPJ's four-part Safety Kit provides journalists and newsrooms with basic safety information on physical, digital and psychological safety resources and tools.

Forbidden Stories – Secure Information

Forbidden Stories: Forbidden Stories is an international network of journalists committed to continuing the work of reporters who have been silenced through threats, imprisonment, or murder

→ **Collaborative Investigations:** Works with global media partners to publish stories that others tried to suppress.

→ **SafeBox Network:** Provides a secure platform for journalists to store sensitive information, ensuring their work can continue if they are unable to do so.
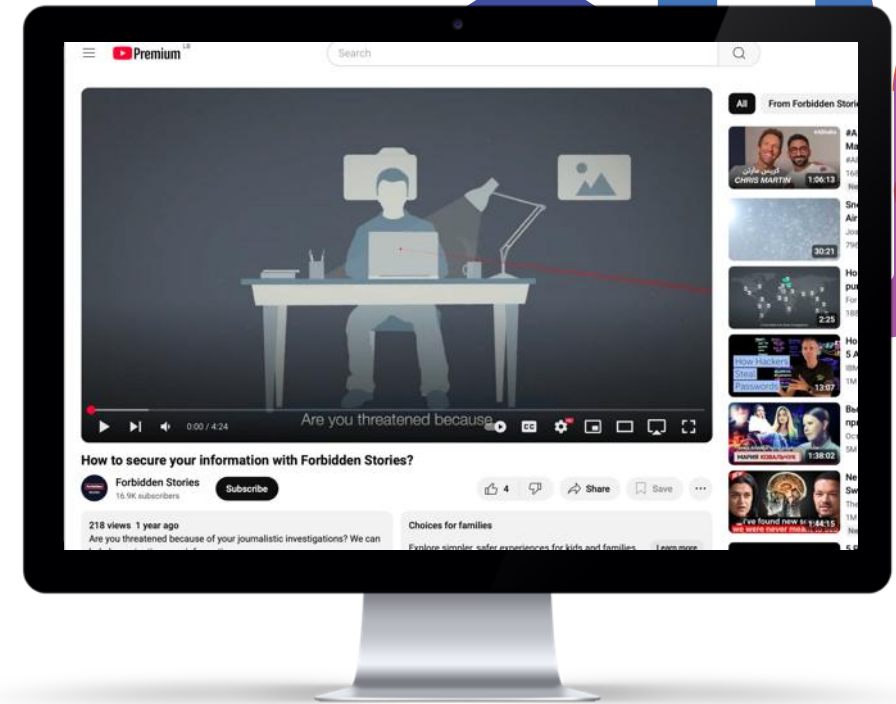

How to secure your information with Forbidden Stories?

Click To Watch

Forbidden Stories – Secure Information

→ **Preserves Truth**: Ensures that critical stories, especially those related to corruption and human rights abuses, are not lost.

→ **Global Awareness**: Brings international attention to local issues, engaging global solidarity and pressure for justice.
www.forbiddenstories.org

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making digital media inclusive
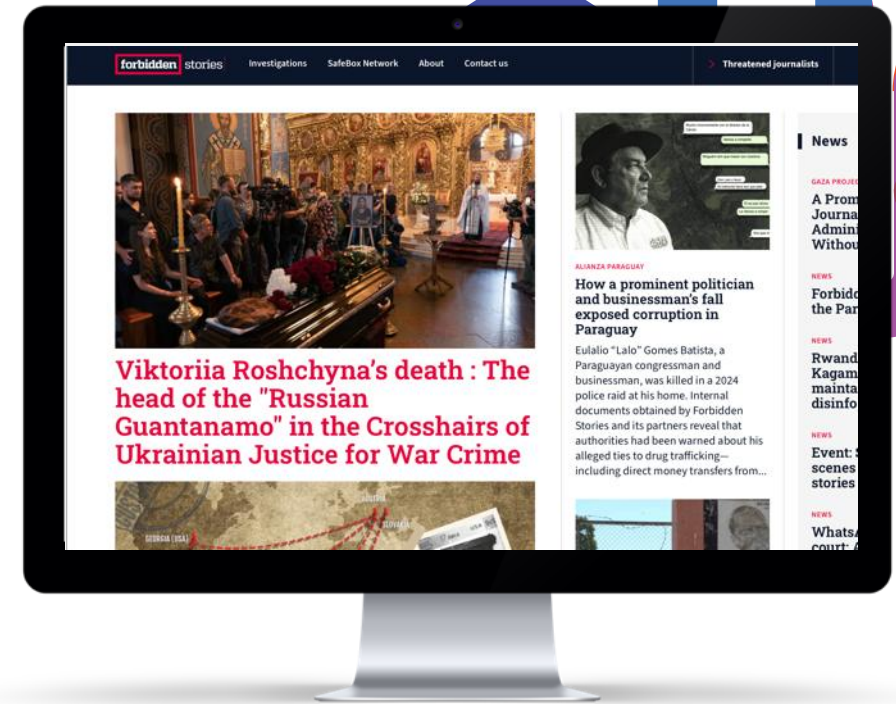
Case Study: Forbidden Stories Journalist Network

We are a collaborative journalism network devoted to pursuing the work of silenced reporters around the world.

All around the world, journalists are silenced through violence, threats and imprisonment because what they were investigating was known to have potentially far-reaching repercussions.

As a media organisation, we believe news stories are of global significance, we have uncovered critical information on issues such as environmental crimes, corruption, organised crime, drug trafficking, disinformation, cyber-surveillance, and human rights violations.
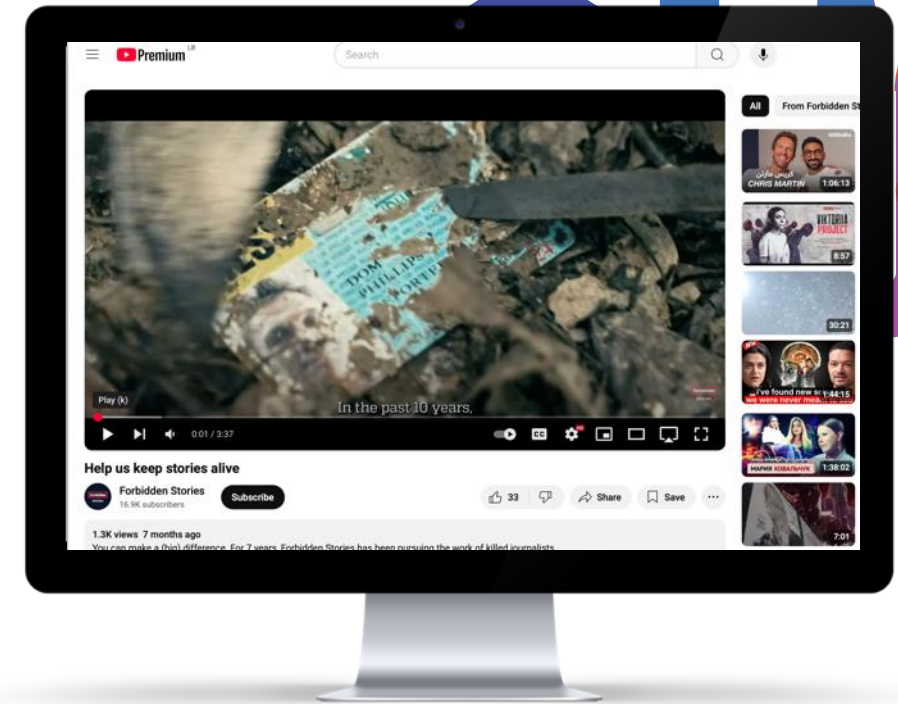
https://youtu.be/EUD8O_SYs0I

https://forbiddenstories.org/about-us/impact/

Click To Watch

Empowering Peace with Ethical Digital Storytelling

Using digital media to promote peace and inclusion, ethical awareness must be embedded in storytelling practices.

1 Practice informed consent before filming or publishing

2 Use storytelling with communities, not about them

3 Encourage peer review or mentorship to check for bias

4 Adopt and adapt ethical guidelines for their own projects

Digital tools and platforms that empower citizen journalists

Citizen journalism involves the collection, analysis, and dissemination of news and information by the general public, often through digital platforms and tools. It enables non-professional reporters to document and share stories, particularly in areas where mainstream media may be absent, biased, or restricted.

Digital tools and platforms empower these citizen journalists by giving them the means to record, edit, publish, and verify content—from social media to decentralised archives, mobile journalism apps, and collaborative reporting spaces. For example, mobile apps and open-source platforms make it easier for individuals to report and share stories securely.

making digital media inclusive

Digital tools and platforms that empower citizen journalists

Digital media tools aren't just tech—they're a **means of participation, protection, and peacebuilding.**
They:

1 **Empower youth** to become agents of change

**2** **Bridge divides** through storytelling and shared learning

3 **Build skills** that promote inclusion, critical thinking, and resilience

Case Study: eyeWitness App a Powerful Tool for Media and Justice

eyeWitness to Atrocities: Developed by the International Bar Association, the eyeWitness to Atrocities app enables users to capture photos and videos that can serve as verifiable evidence in legal proceedings.

This app turns war crime footage into legally admissible evidence

→ **Accountability:** Provides a tool for documenting human rights violations, aiding in the pursuit of justice.

→ **Empowerment:** Equips individuals in conflict zones with the means to safely report atrocities.

https://www.wired.com/story/eyewitness-war-crimes-app

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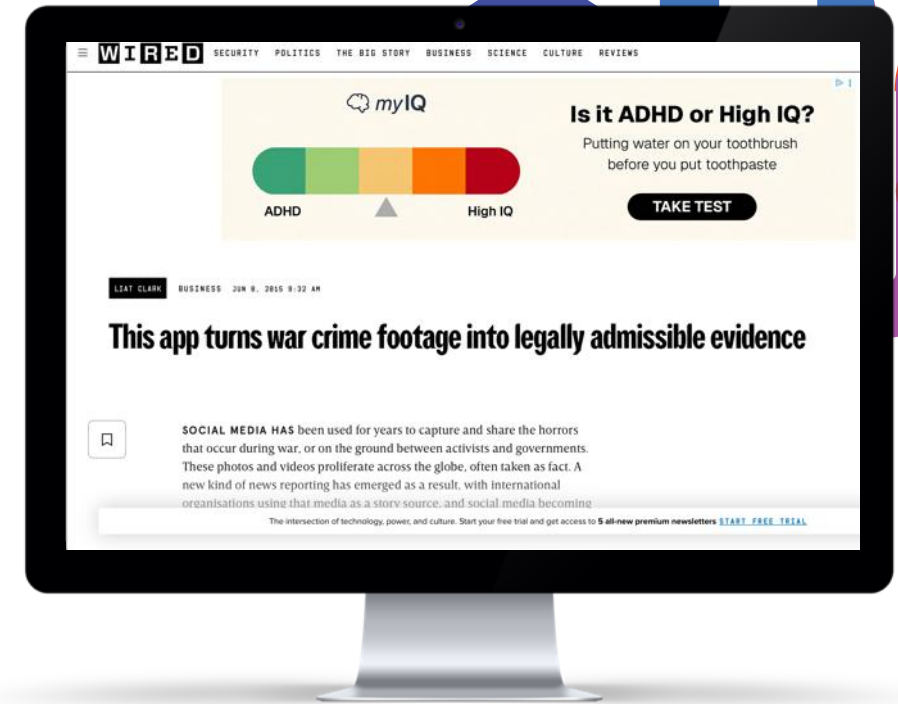
Case Study: eyeWitness App a Powerful Tool for Media and Justice

→ **Metadata Embedding:** Automatically records GPS coordinates, date, time, and device information to authenticate media.

→ **Secure Storage:** Uploads encrypted files to a secure server, maintaining the chain of custody for legal admissibility

How we make your footage a powerful tool for justice

1 The eyeWitness to Atrocities app lets you capture photos and videos with embedded metadata to verify their authenticity in court.

2 Footage transmission and storage ensures a secure chain of custody for legal evidence.

3 eyeWitness compiles received footage into dossiers for investigators.

https://www.eyewitness.global/

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making digital media inclusive

Why Digital Media and Tools Matter in Peacebuilding and Mediation

REASON Fills the Gaps Left by Traditional Media

Empowers citizens to document events directly and share urgent stories

WHAT IT MEANS Mainstream media often overlooks conflict zones, marginalised communities, or grassroots peace efforts—especially in remote or politically sensitive areas. Digital tools empower ordinary people to **document events in real time** using mobile phones and video apps. **Share lived experiences** that offer more authentic and diverse perspectives

EXAMPLE In Ukraine, local citizens used Telegram and Signal to share alerts and document bombings when traditional news sources were blocked.

TOOL
InShot, eyeWitness to Atrocities, Signal

Why Digital Media and Tools Matter in Peacebuilding and Mediation

REASON **Give Voice to the Marginalised**

Amplifies stories of refugees, youth, minorities

WHAT IT MEANS Digital storytelling becomes a **healing and advocacy** tool. People from underrepresented backgrounds—youth, women, ethnic minorities, refugees—can reclaim narratives about their lives and communities.

EXAMPLE Helps reclaim narratives, raise awareness, and reduce stereotypes

TOOL
Tools like TikTok, Glide Apps**, Anchor.fm** or **Canva** help them tell their stories via podcasts or visual post

making digital media inclusive

Why Digital Media and Tools Matter in Peacebuilding and Mediation

REASON **Combats Misinformation and Hate Speech**

Counters disinformation online

WHAT IT MEANS Social media is often used to spread fear, hate, or disinformation. But **the same platforms** can be used to:

→ **Fact-check. Promote verified narratives**

→ **Challenge harmful stereotypes** with real stories and empathy

EXAMPLE Migrants of the Mediterranean publishes audio testimonies from refugees to counter fear-based migration rhetoric.

TOOL
Use fact checking platforms like Demagog, Correctiv, CrowdTangle

making digital media inclusive

Why Digital Media and Tools Matter in Peacebuilding and Mediation

REASON **Builds Cross-Border Understanding**

Facilitates dialogue across cultures and regions

WHAT IT MEANS **Promotes empathy, shared goals, and peacebuilding collaboration.**

Digital platforms remove geographical and cultural barriers. They allow: Youth from different backgrounds to co-create peace messages. Dialogue across conflict lines via online forums, closed groups, and virtual exchange platforms.

EXAMPLE Soliya's virtual exchange connects youth in Europe and the Middle East to discuss identity, conflict, and media influence in moderated sessions.

TOOL
Soliya Virtual Exchange, Facebook Closed Groups

Why Digital Media and Tools Matter in Peacebuilding and Mediation

REASON **Enables Safe and Anonymous Reporting**

Ensures protection in hostile environments

WHAT IT MEANS Allows whistleblowers and peace reporters to share safely. In conflict zones or authoritarian settings, safety is a major barrier to reporting. Digital tools provide:

Encryption (e.g., Signal, eyeWitness to Atrocities)
Metadata tagging for authenticity
Anonymous publishing (e.g., Forbidden Stories, Bellingcat methods)

EXAMPLE Human rights defenders in Syria used secure apps to share geotagged photos with international media without revealing identities.

TOOL
InShot, eyeWitness to Atrocities, Signal

Why Digital Media and Tools Matter in Peacebuilding and Mediation

REASON Enable Digital & Media Literacy

Builds **critical 21st-century** skills in youth

WHAT IT MEANS Prepares learners for advocacy, employment, and civic engagement. They can develop real-world competencies; such as critical thinking, responsible content creation, ethical journalism, fact-checking and cross-verification. These are essential not only for employment but for active citizenship and democratic resilience

EXAMPLE Use Mural to brainstorm peace messaging, Canva to create infographics, and YouTube to publish digital stories.

TOOL Canva, YouTube, Mural, StoryMaps

making digital media inclusive

Building Digital Bridges: Media's Power in Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion

→**Digital Tools:** StoryMaker, Kobo Toolbox Collect, SoundCloud, Eyewitness for Atrocities, KineMaster, InShot, Mastodon / Fediverse platforms, Correctiv's CrowdNewsroom

→**Exercise:** Crafting Ethical Peace-Focused Narratives

→**Exercise:** Intersection of Activism, Media, and Digital Advocacy

→**Resources:** Guides, Toolkits, Articles etc.

Digital Tools:

Citizen Journalism & Truth Storytelling

Mobile Journalism (MoJo) apps like StoryMaker or Collect. KoboToolbox Collect is a Powerful and intuitive data collection tools to make an impact. A data collection, management, and visualisation platform used globally for research and social good. Our mission is to support open-source data systems and technology for humanitarian action, development, environmental protection, peacebuilding, and human rights.

Click to View

https://storymaker.cc/
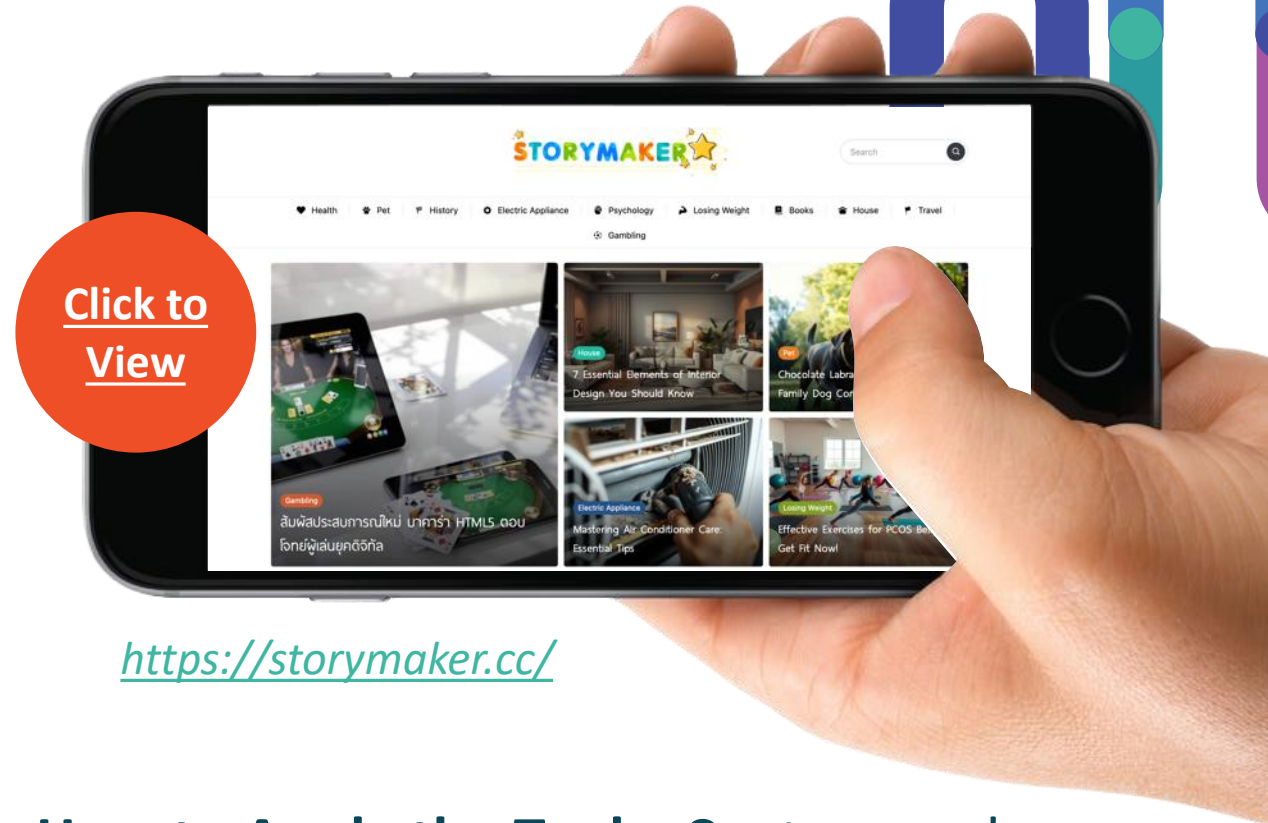
How to Apply the Tools: Capture and edit community stories using mobile devices. Train locals in basic phone filming + storytelling. Ensure consent and safety of subjects.

making digital media inclusive

Digital Tools:

Citizen Journalism & Truth Storytelling

YouTube: Publish video stories for a wide audience. Use subtitles and tags for accessibility and reach. Moderate comments to prevent trolling

SoundCloud: Share community radio, spoken word, or oral histories, conflicts, and personal stories. Encourage underrepresented voices to speak and publish. Ensure hosts and voices feel safe from online abuse.

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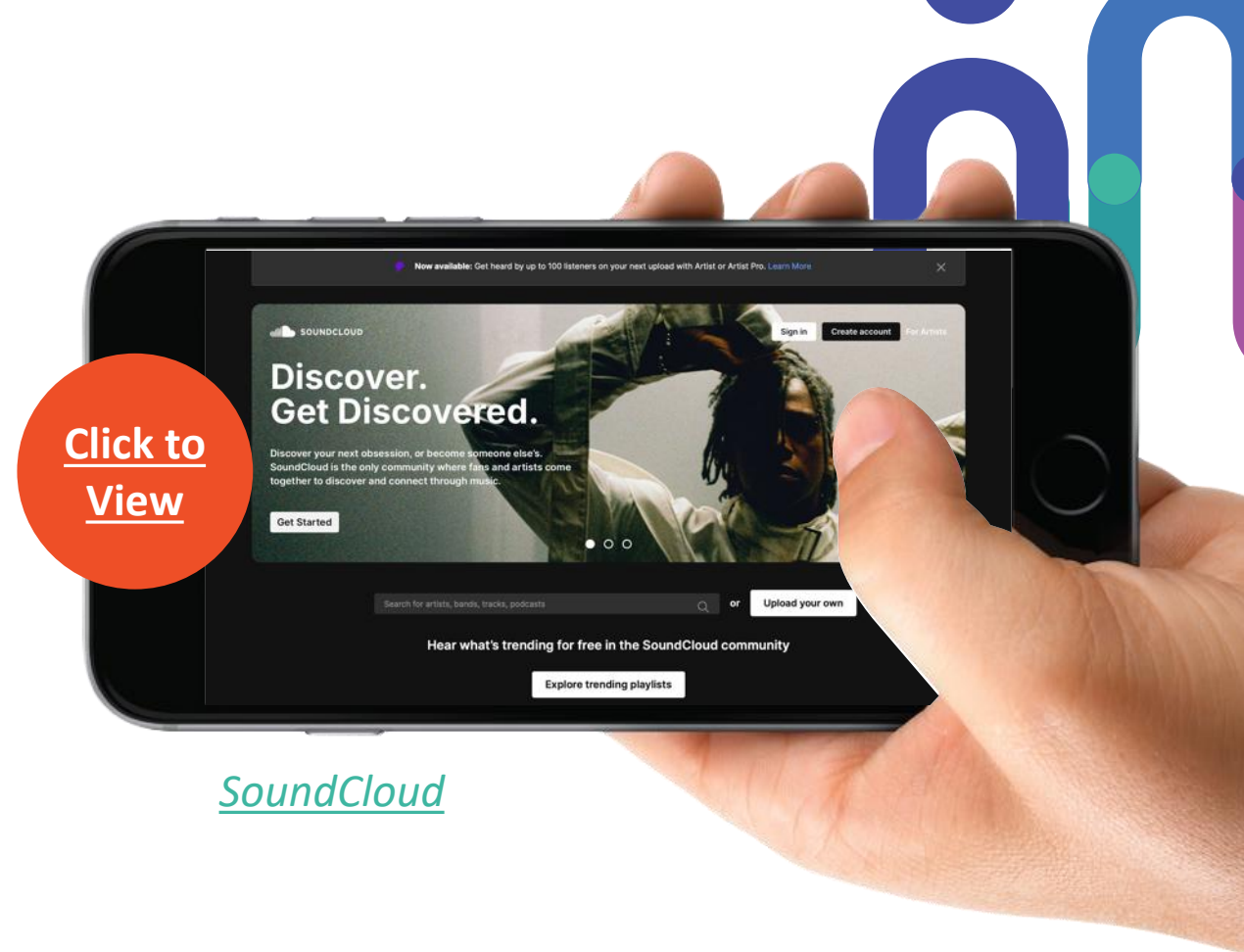
SoundCloud

Digital Tools:

Ethical Considerations in Grassroots Reporting

Eyewitness to Atrocities (by eyeWitness) Allows secure, time-stamped capture of human rights abuses with metadata. Ideal for conflict settings or marginalised voices documenting violence. Use only in secure, trained environments to avoid harm to reporters

KineMaster / InShot. Edit videos ethically by allowing blurred faces, voice distortion. Apply these when working with vulnerable populations. Do not manipulate context or scenes that could mislead

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https://www.kinemaster.com/

making digital media inclusive

Digital Tools:

Decentralised Media on Trust & Information Credibility

Mastodon / Fediverse platforms Share local news in federated environments not controlled by large corporations. Curate trusted networks and hashtags. Be careful misinformation may still spread if moderation is weak.

Correctiv's CrowdNewsroom. Enables collective investigations and publishing from the community. Used for fact-checking decentralised or local news claims. Ensure that the data collected is verified and responsibly analysed

Click to View

https://crowdnewsroom.org/en/

"Who Do You Trust?"

Build critical thinking around trust in decentralised media.

➤ Learners select **three news stories**—one from mainstream media, one from a blog or influencer, and one from a collaborative citizen news platform (like Wikinews).

➤ **Analyse** each using criteria:

1. Who is the author?

2. Are sources verified?

3. What emotions does the story evoke?

4. Could this be misinformation?

➤ **Discuss:** *How does decentralised media affect trust? What standards should citizen media follow?*

Exercise 2

"Build Your Ethical Toolkit"

Instructions: In small groups, learners role-play as grassroots journalists covering a sensitive issue (e.g., migration, minority rights, conflict recovery).

They must:

1. Design a consent form

2. Draft a narrative outline using ethical principles

3. Present a safety plan

Outcome: Understand the real-life complexity of ethical dilemmas and learn how to apply digital media responsibly.

"Voice from My Street" –
A Digital Storytelling Exercise

Step 1: Identify a Story
Ask learners to reflect on a recent event or personal/community experience related to conflict, inclusion, or misunderstanding. It could involve:

→ A local misunderstanding that was resolved.

→ A community initiative promoting peace.

→ An incident of exclusion, discrimination, or solidarity.

Step 2: Research & Record
Participants will gather the basic facts and/or interview 1–2 people (with consent). This can be written, audio-recorded, or filmed (using phones or the eyeWitness to Atrocities app where relevant).

Step 3: Create a Citizen Journalism Piece
They use one of the following formats:
→**Written blog post** (300–500 words)
→**Short video report** (1–3 minutes, using tools like InShot or Canva Video Editor)
→**Photo essay** with captions
→**Instagram-style story carousel** explaining the story visually

Step 4: Reflection and Ethical Check
Learners complete a short reflection worksheet:
→Did you gain consent to share this story?
→Is your story fair and respectful?
→Does it support understanding, not blame?

Step 5: Share or Submit
Participants share their pieces in a virtual classroom gallery (e.g., Padlet or Moodle), or present to peers in a digital "peace pitch" session.

Exercise 4

"EyeWitness to Atrocities App"

EyeWitness to Atrocities is a free mobile app developed by the International Bar Association. It helps citizen journalists, activists, and witnesses **capture verifiable photos and videos of human rights violations** and **securely store and share them** with legal bodies or media without compromising their safety.

This tool **bridges grassroots truth-telling with legal accountability**, supporting ethical and secure reporting from conflict-affected areas.

Activity: *"Reporting What Matters – Using EyeWitness as a Peace Media Tool"*

Learners will explore how EyeWitness supports grassroots media, then simulate its use by creating a responsible citizen journalism scenario (no real violence required).

https://www.eyewitness.global/

Exercise 4

1 **Explore the Tool** (15–20 min)
Visit: https://www.eyewitness.global
Watch the 2-minute demo video
Discuss: How does this app ensure authenticity?
→ Why is time/date/location stamping important in citizen journalism?
→ How does it protect journalists and victims?

2 **Scenario Creation** (20 min)
In pairs or small groups, learners choose or imagine a peacebuilding or social justice issue (e.g., police harassment at a protest, unfair eviction, water contamination, or peaceful resistance). They:
→ Describe what would need to be documented.
→ Plan how to report it ethically and responsibly using the EyeWitness tool.
→ Consider risks and how they would manage them.

3 **Ethical Journalism Reflection (15 min)**
→ What ethical concerns arise? (e.g., consent, retraumatisation, safety)
→ How does the app help mitigate these risks?
→ How could it be misused—and how to prevent that?

Tip: You don't need to use the real app in class (though learners can download it). Use it to spark critical conversations and design thinking. This activity is great for youth who may want to advocate for their communities using technology safely and credibly.
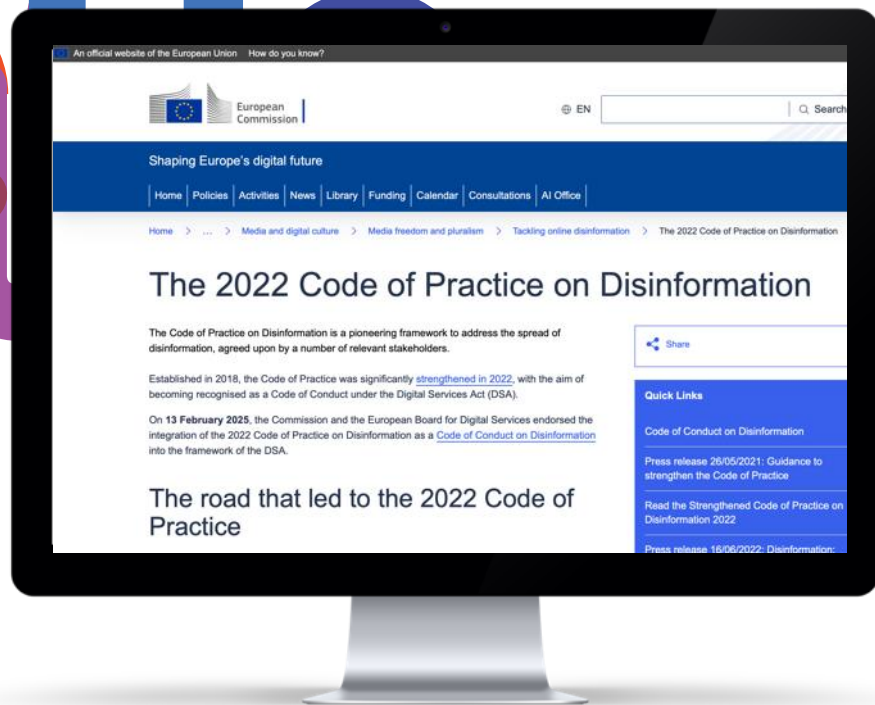
Commission and the European Board for Digital Services: The 2022 Code of Practice on Disinformation

EU: The 2022 Code of Practice on Disinformation

The Code of Practice on Disinformation is a pioneering framework and tool to address the spread of disinformation, agreed upon by a number of relevant stakeholders. Provides self-regulatory standards to fight disinformation.
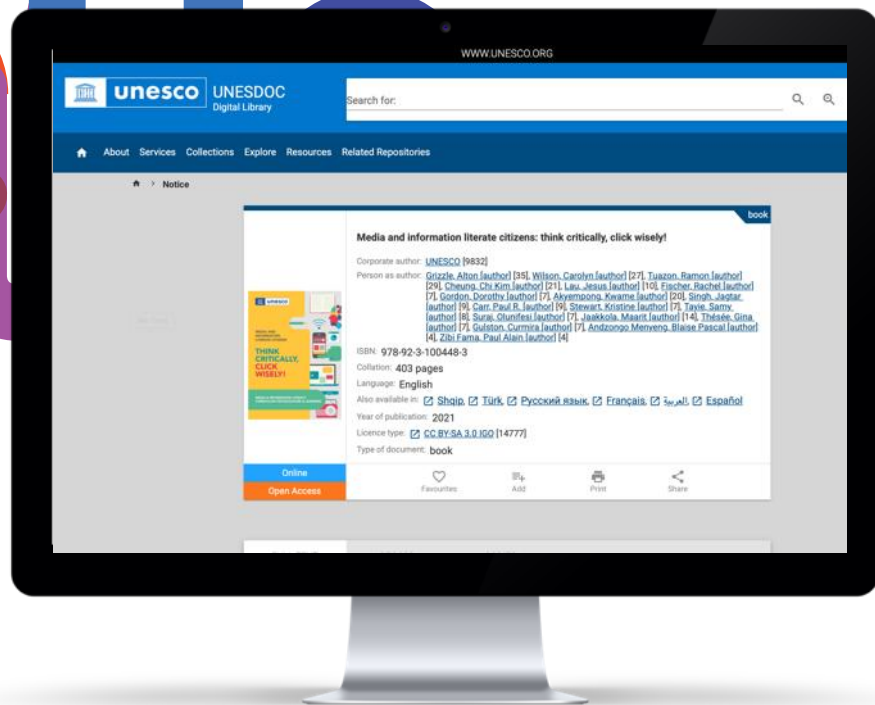
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Resources

The 2022 Code of Practice on Disinformation
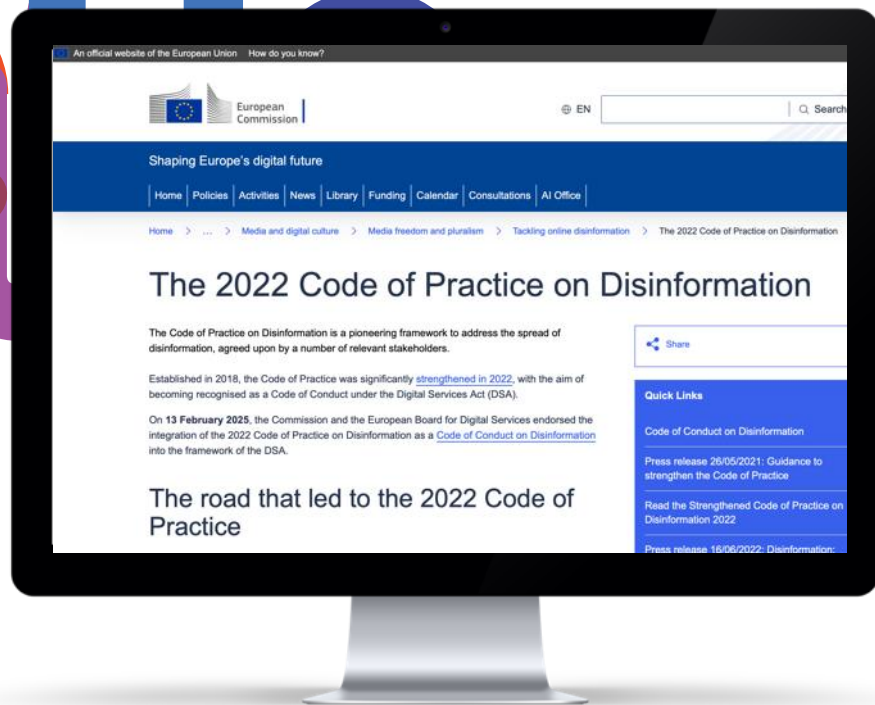
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At the core of the EU strategy against disinformation, the Code has proven to be an effective tool to limit the spread of online disinformation, including during electoral periods and to quickly respond to crises, such as the coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

Resources

UNESCO Media and Information Literate Citizens

This pioneering curriculum presents a comprehensive competency framework of media and information. It features various detailed modules covering the range of competencies needed to navigate today's communications ecosystem. This resource links media cultural literacy and the exponential information literacy curriculum; everyone can become media and information literate, as well as peer-educators of media and information literacy.
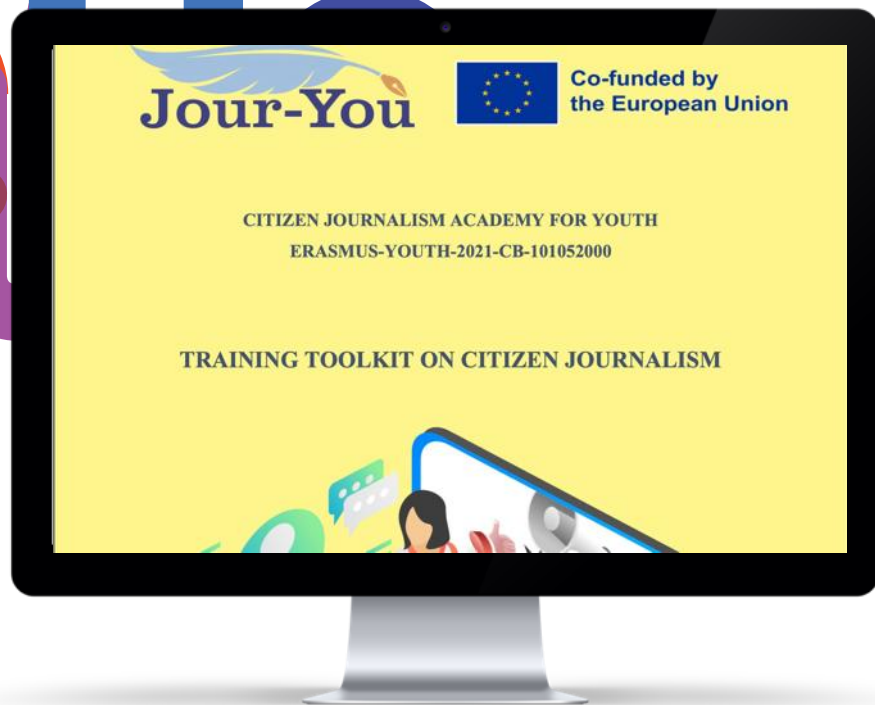
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Training Toolkit on Citizen Journalism

This toolkit presents accessible methods and techniques where young people can apply the basic principles of citizen journalism and media literacy. The focus falls on building skills to search and process information, detect and recognise fake news, create content and distribute it through social media and other traditional channels. Special attention is paid to building leadership skills and communication with specific audiences, as well as the development of an ethical position on important societal topics and issues

Jour-You

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ERASMUS-YOUTH-2021-CB-101052000

TRAINING TOOLKIT ON CITIZEN JOURNALISM

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The Citizen Journalist's Toolkit

This guidebook is the culmination of research for the Future of Information Alliance, an organisation seeking to understand the evolving role of information in our lives.

It focuses on breaking down the "digital divide" and encouraging opportunity for all; InfoLiteracy, the idea, improving access to and knowledge of digital resources; collaboration and culture.
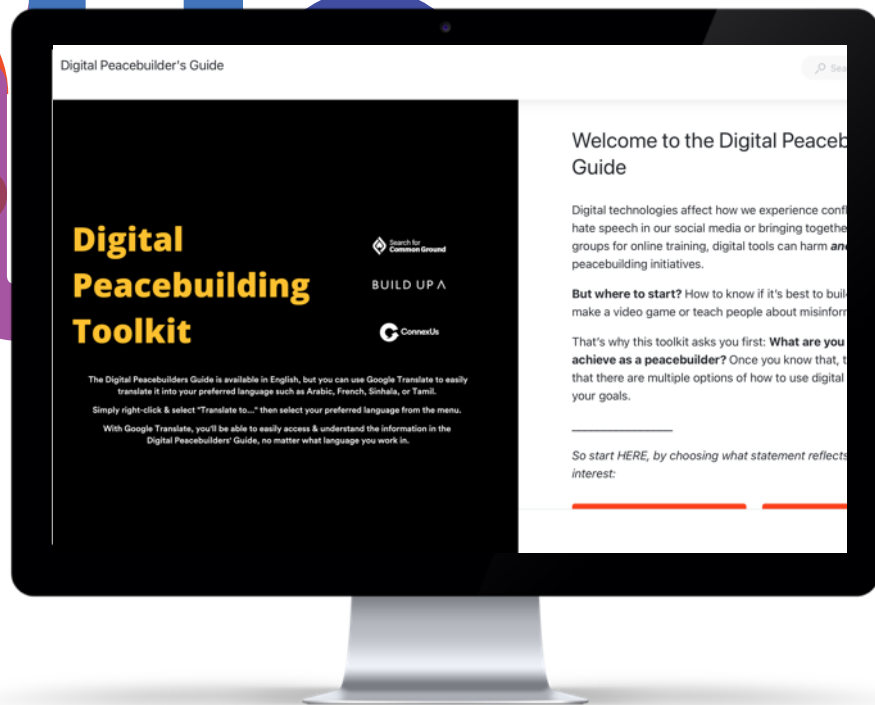
Click To Read

Change the world:
A toolkit for
citizen journalists

Click To Read

Citizen Journalist Network and Toolkit

This toolkit presents accessible methods and techniques where young people can apply the basic principles of citizen journalism and media literacy. The focus falls on building skills to search and process information, detect and recognise fake news, create content and distribute it through social media and other traditional channels. Special attention is paid to building leadership skills and communication with specific audiences, as well as the development of an ethical position on important societal topics and issues

Digital Peacebuilding Toolkit

The Digital Peacebuilders Guide

A comprehensive guide features almost thirty digital peacebuilding approaches, from digital dialogue to virtual reality and many more in between. Explore the guide either by a need or a goal you have, or use the menu to see the full list of approaches.
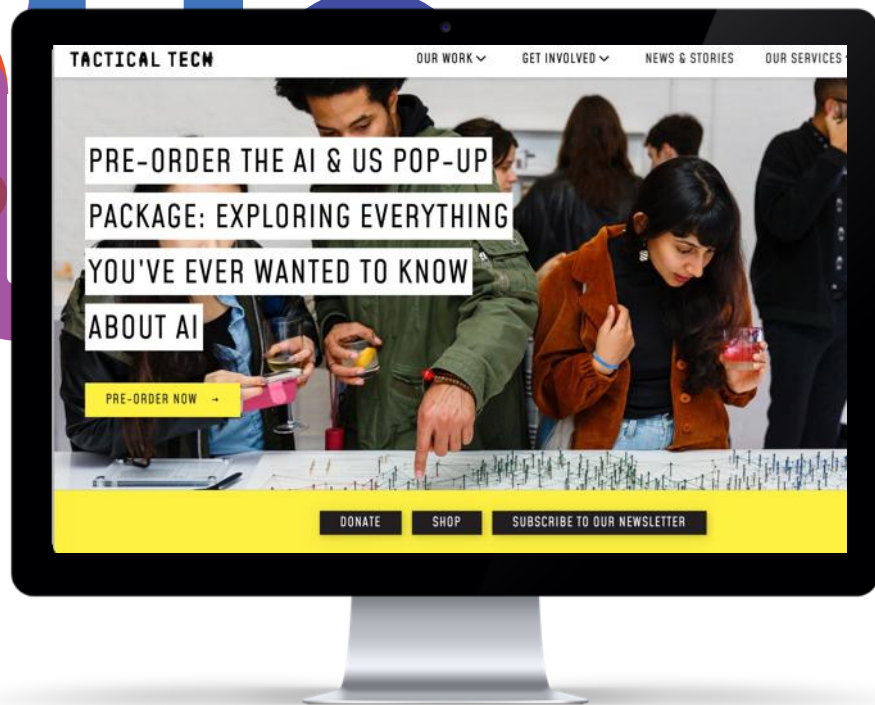
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Digital Media Tools and Technology for Peace

Click through the number icons in this overview of digital tools and methods that peacebuilders and peacemakers have used across different contexts, namely: surveys, social media, e-learning, virtual exchange, film and audio, games, group messaging, and crowdsourcing.

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Commission and the European Board for Digital Services: The 2022 Code of Practice on Disinformation

Tactical Tech

We empower individuals, communities, and organisations to navigate the challenges involved in preventing digital techonlogies from amplifying social, political, and environmental crises, threatening the foundations of democracy. We promote critical thinking, build the capacity of individuals and communities and enable understanding and knowledge.

WITNESS Media Lab

The WITNESS Lab is dedicated to unleashing the potential of eyewitness video as a powerful tool to report, monitor and advocate for human rights. The skills needed to use those videos safely and effectively are critical to harnessing the incredible potential that stands before us. These videos provide access to detention centres, conflict zones, rural communities, and city streets, capturing abuse in real time by those who live, witness, and experience it.

Click To View

Conclusion
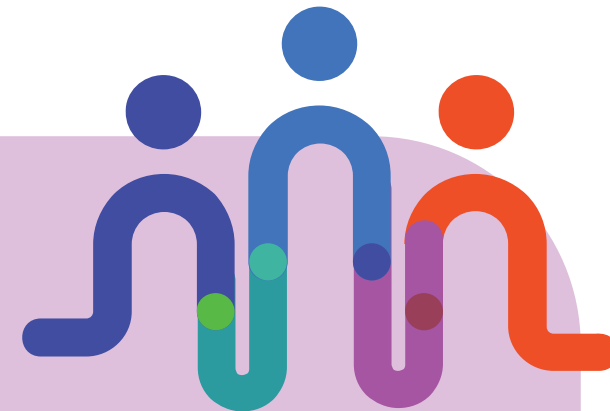
1 Digital Media as a Tool for Post-Conflict Reconciliation in Europe

Digital media plays a **transformative role** in post-conflict reconciliation by enabling **inclusive narratives, amplifying marginalised voices**, and **enabling cross-border empathy**. From online memorials to digital dialogue spaces, it offers **new pathways to healing** and **rebuilding trust** across divided communities. As Europe continues to face emerging tensions and historical wounds, empowering young people to use digital tools responsibly is vital for sustained peace.

Conclusion
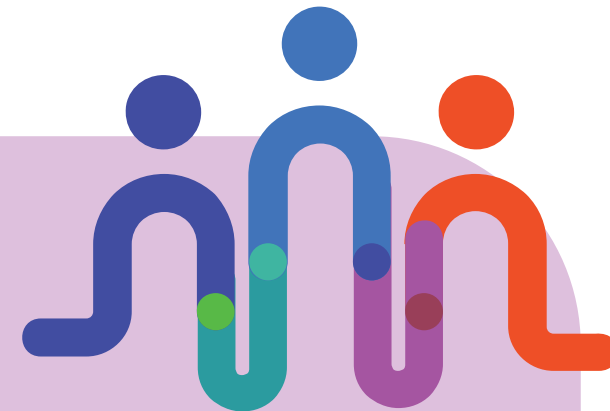
2 **Storytelling for Social Change: Using Digital Media to Promote Peace Initiatives**

Storytelling is a powerful method for **inspiring empathy, building connections, and mobilising action**. When combined with digital media, it becomes a **scalable and accessible vehicle for peace initiatives**, especially when led by youth. By sharing **authentic experiences**, **highlighting solutions**, and **engaging communities** through video, blogs, and social media, storytelling can **shape narratives** that shift public perception and contribute to lasting social change.
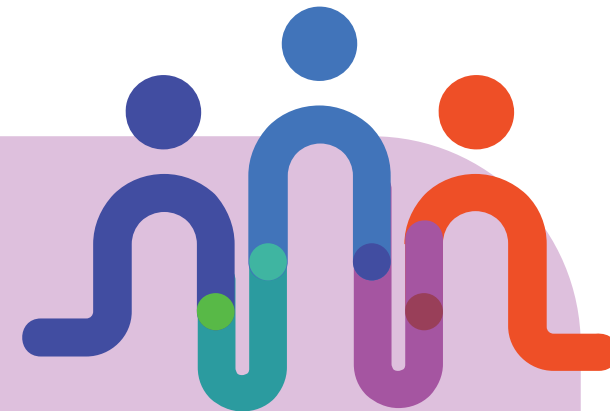
Conclusion
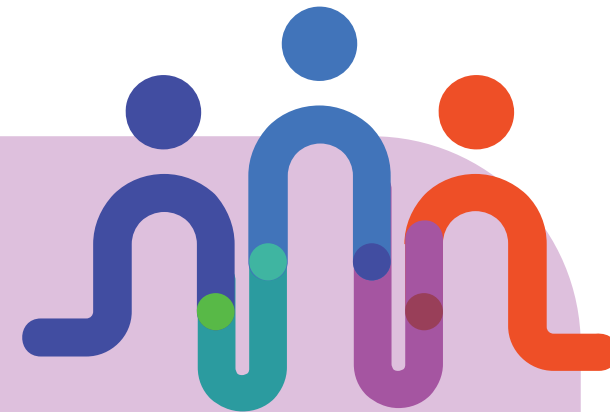
3 European Digital Platforms Supporting Peace Journalism and Constructive Dialogue

European platforms such as **Correctiv**, **Climatetracker**, **Clio Muse**, and **Bellingcat** provide **critical infrastructure for ethical journalism, fact-based reporting, and cross-cultural understanding**. These tools and networks support **inclusive content creation,** help **counter disinformation**, and nurture **respectful, open conversations** across borders. Investing in **digital literacy** and platform accessibility ensures young peacebuilders can actively participate in shaping Europe's shared future.

Conclusion

4 **The Role of Citizen Journalism in Strengthening Social Cohesion**

Citizen journalism enables communities to **reclaim narratives, challenge injustice, and promote inclusion**. It builds **local agency,** supports **truth-telling**, and **holds power accountable** — particularly in places where traditional media fails to represent diverse voices. By equipping youth and marginalised groups with tools, training, and ethical guidance, citizen journalism becomes not just a media practice, but a peacebuilding strategy rooted in community ownership and trust.

Module 4: Building Digital Bridges: Media's Power in Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion

You have completed **Part 4 - Focus Area 4**
The Role of Citizen Journalism in Strengthening Social Cohesion

Next is **Module 5 - Focus Area 1**
xxx

www.**includememedia**.eu

* Note to manage waste please print this document in greyscale or black and white rather than in colour. Please print on both sides of the paper (duplex) and if you can print multiple slides or pages on one page.