

# *COMBATING MIS- AND DISINFORMATION WITH FACT-BASED JOURNALISM*

*A BETTER FUTURE BEGINS WITH AN INFORMED PUBLIC*



## **Executive Summary:**

Propaganda, partisanship and civic nearsightedness are at an all-time high and access to quality, fact-checked journalism has never been more critical. As a free, nonprofit news source and Seattle's premier NPR affiliate, KUOW is uniquely poised to cut through the noise of on-demand platforms and personal echo-chambers to create a locally-focused space for human connection, conversation and curiosity. In order to continue shifting the narrative and ensuring fewer systemic barriers to quality journalism, KUOW must evaluate and expand opportunities to defend consumers against targeted disinformation, providing the programming and tools needed to stay engaged, informed and able to make sense of a relentless news cycle.

## Need for Fair and Accurate News Reporting: A Crisis of Trust

On January 6, 2021, a mob of pro-Trump insurrectionists stormed the U.S. Capitol sending shockwaves through the nation and the world. Many experts maintained that this event was years in the making thanks, in part, to a steady, toxic spread of disinformation proliferated by Trump and his supporters. A new poll from NPR and Ipsos proves the tremendous staying power of such mis- and disinformation. The poll found that one-third of Americans believe Joe Biden's win was fraudulent despite seemingly indisputable facts to the contrary.

Center for an Informed Public researcher Kate Starbird discussed the compounding connection between disinformation and crisis.<sup>2</sup> As hotbeds of uncertainty, crises create the perfect opportunity for those wishing to spread mistrust and disinformation, especially targeting and affecting underrepresented communities. The Covid-19 crisis has only exacerbated these systemic divides caused by hate, racism, economic hardship and the hyper politicization of basic human rights.

Trust in journalism continues to erode, accelerated by the rise of social media. Biased algorithms combined with a steep increase in on-demand media options continue to provide mainstream pathways for opinion pieces and inflammatory personalities to become the new go-to sources of information. If that were not enough, the sheer volume and nonstop pace of the news cycle is stressful and overwhelming, causing many consumers to settle on a limited range of sources. These echo chambers of self-curated news signal a worrying loss of curiosity and the sobering realization that too many consumers are satisfied to live within dangerous information bubbles of their own making.

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**[I]f you are worried about threats to your freedom or threats to democracy or feel like someone is threatening your way of life, you are going to be drawn into misinformation that caters to that sort of value system.<sup>1</sup>**

**Kolina Koltai**

Postdoctoral scholar studying trust in information systems with the University of Washington's Center for an Informed Public (CIP).

1. Miller, K., & Gordon, K. (2021, January 12), How years of disinformation led to an insurrection at the Capitol. *MPR News*.  
2. Kate Starbird on Crises and Disinformation [Video file]. (2019, February 20). *Disinfo Portal*.

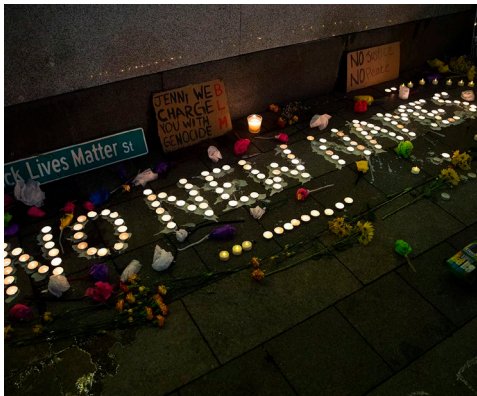
## Our Focus: Original, Local News Reporting

As an independent, nonprofit news organization, KUOW answers to its members and the public, not financial shareholders. This allows the station to practice transparency and focus on in-depth, local storytelling. KUOW staff and board pride themselves on being a “place to land” for information and believe that investment in fair and accurate reporting is a necessity for a thriving, well-informed democracy.



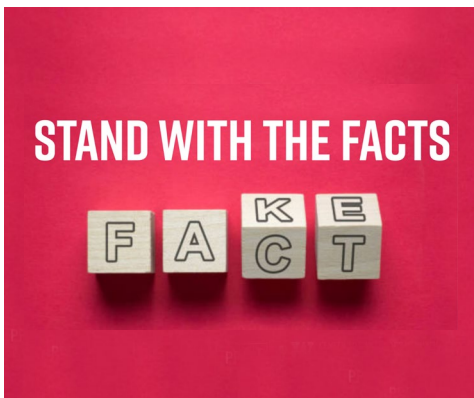
### Refuting False Claims

KUOW drew [national attention](#) as the first news organization in the country to decide the station would stop airing White House Coronavirus briefings live, due to the inability to fact-check inaccuracies in real time.



### Sharing Voices of Pandemic and Protest

Through journalism series like [Voices of the Pandemic](#) and [Beyond the Protest](#), KUOW brought the community frontline, first-person accounts from medical professionals, patients, protesters, civil rights leaders and more. *The Record* continues to facilitate regular interviews with national, state and local leaders along with public health officials so listeners can get their most pressing questions answered in real time.



### Standing with the Facts

As our community faced a pandemic, protests and an election, KUOW launched the [Stand with the Facts](#) event series. Hosted by KUOW’s Kim Malcolm, the series featured free community conversations and [weekly segments](#) on *The Record* with misinformation experts, in partnership with UW’s [Center for an Informed Public](#).

## Aspirations: Building on Our Success with Your Support

**Informing the Next Generation:** KUOW's [RadioActive Youth Media](#) program is shaping the next generation of media makers and consumers. Through award-winning workshops, RadioActive empowers young people with the media literacy and narrative tools they need to amplify the stories that matter to them. Program participants and graduates offer unparalleled insight into how younger audiences navigate news and information. KUOW must continue fostering a platform for youth voice and media literacy, offering audiences of all ages the understanding and tools they need to make critical, informed choices about the media they consume.

**No Paywalls Ever:** Access to honest, fact-checked information should not be available only to those who can afford it. KUOW must retain the station's nonprofit status and a strong financial position to not only weather storms and economic downturns, but also continue to invest and grow.

**Content, Content, Content:** Creating meaningful, local content starts with hiring more great content creators and storytellers. Like local news organizations everywhere, KUOW is struggling with insufficient staff and resources. Every day, KUOW journalists share stories of heartbreak, justice and community. Stories that expose corruption or abuse, offer new perspectives or refute false claims. The station wants to go deeper and make investigative journalism and more consistent coverage of the arts and sciences a part of KUOW's news beats.

## Expected Results

KUOW will never be able to eradicate mis- and disinformation, but the station has a duty to guard truth and information and lead the fight against the spread and creation of propaganda. Building trust within the communities is essential to providing the tools and knowledge needed to help listeners become savvy news consumers. KUOW is committed to breaking through information bubbles with fact-checked, trustworthy journalism that nurtures a more informed and engaged public, motivated to build a stronger democracy.