

**CRITIQUING
SPREADERS of the
MISINFORMATION PANDEMIC:
BROADCAST NEWS MEDIA –
NEWSPAPERS**

Dr. Barry Wellar, C.M.

Professor Emeritus, University of Ottawa

President, Information Research Board

<http://wellar.ca/informationresearch/>

Ottawa, Canada

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A. Background to Critiquing Spreaders of the Misinformation Pandemic: Broadcast News Media – Newspapers

The background section provides context and orientation for this report by means of a brief outline of work completed to date on the *misinformation* topic.

Three preliminary remarks are necessary before overviewing prior work.

First, the convention of using italics or quotation marks with misinformation was adopted upon completion of several pilot studies which found that at best misinformation is a nonsense term with no substantive foundation, and seems to be used willy-nilly with little or no discretion.

Or, to re-phrase, our research finding is that misinformation is at best a catchphrase which defies definition in structural or functional terms. Consequently, I cannot put the terms information and misinformation on the same page, much less in the same sentence, without feeling serious discomfort.

Therefore, due to limited options for emphasizing a word while depreciating or deep-sixing it at the same time, wherever it is appropriate italics are used in the reminder of this report to differentiate between information which is the real deal and *misinformation* which is an unreal deal and has nothing whatsoever to do with information.

Second. the term news distinguishes broadcast news media from other broadcast media including social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, various and sundry blogs, etc., which seemingly broadcast anything by anybody who posts a comment.

In the former case, news media organizations are subject to regulations, standards, principles and other accreditation protocols pertaining to claims about information. As a result, they can be held to account for use of the term 'misinformation' in a headline, editorial, report, column, commentary, announcement, or other production. (Endnote 1)

In the case of social media, however, there are no accreditation standards associated with use of the term 'information', so they are not part of this body of research into critiquing broadcast news media as spreaders of the *misinformation* pandemic.

Third, for many years sharp distinctions were made between broadcast media such as radio and television, and print news media, with newspapers in the latter category.

In more recent years, however, as a result of a technology-driven shift many newspapers are now available online as broadcast versions, and many are available in print as well as online.

Since there could be more broadcast news media reports, the title notes that the focus of this report is on critiquing newspapers as spreaders of the *misinformation* pandemic.

Eight reports have been published on three research themes, and in the next several pages they are put in perspective by means of ‘snapshot’ summaries which highlight the connections between and among reports. With the overview in place, section 2 discusses the contributions made by each report to a framework for critiquing newspapers as spreaders of the *misinformation* pandemic.

The *misinformation* series of productions commenced two years ago in May, 2020. Three reports document the origins of our inquiries into use of the term *misinformation*, and provide the results of our investigations into why, when, where, by whom, etc., the term is used, including the ways of knowing associated with its use.

- [DOES DONALD TRUMP HAVE THE KNOW-HOW TO SAVE THE U.S.A.?](#) (May 8, 2020)
- [The Inescapable Truth about *Disinformation* and *Misinformation*? They have NOTHING at All to do with Information](#) (September 8, 2020)
- [Initial Thoughts about 'Fauxinfo' as an Antidote to the 'Misinformation' Pandemic](#) (February 28, 2021)

One summary finding from those reports is that popularity of the term *misinformation* has achieved pandemic proportions – Google searches based on “misinformation” as the keyword yield 60,000,000 results. That is, the term along with its companion term “disinformation” appears in 60,000,000 web pages, which could translate into being used in many, many millions, indeed billions of statements –, and the surge in results largely occurred within the past decade or so, that is post 2010.

However, there is a huge credibility problem with the use of the term.

In brief, scans of thousands of web pages which contain the term *misinformation* did not locate any research which rationally establishes that the term “misinformation” has substantive, verifiable meaning, or that it is more than just a loosely used figure of speech, or a catchphrase if you will. (Endnote 2)

William Shakespeare’s play “Much Ado about Nothing” and television’s “Seinfeld”, a situation comedy about nothing, come to mind when contemplating *misinformation* as popular language about nothing. (Endnote 3)

With those kinds of thoughts in mind from the early stages of this research, and given that *misinformation* was found to have nothing to do with information, questions began

to mount about the bodies of literature that are responsible for spreading a term which does not amount to a 'hill of beans' with regard to substantive foundations.

Discussions around those questions were translated into a research agenda to examine why and how which bodies of literature became spreaders of *misinformation* and containing, perhaps, many, many millions of statements using the term, *misinformation*.

As the reader may be aware, a convention in academe is to refer to 'the literature', as in the question, 'Have you completed a review of the literature?'

I expanded that concept in a project undertaken more than 15 years ago and identified nine bodies of literature that were pertinent to a commissioned report on Geography and the Media that I prepared for the joint session of the Canadian Council on Geographic Education (CCGE), the Royal Canadian Geographical Society (RCGS), and the Canadian Association of Geographers (CAG) at the 2005 annual meeting of the CAG.

While the intended audience for the report was academics and journalists, the broad scope of the research design involving geography and the media means the results are applicable to this pilot study.

(http://www.cangeoeducation.ca/programs/geoliteracy/docs/symposium_june2005_media_wellar.pdf)

For the purposes of context, it is recalled that the bodies of literature are named:

- Learned;
- Popular;
- Corporate/Institutional-Public;
- Corporate/Institutional-Private;
- Legal;
- Regulatory;
- Professional;
- Interest Group-Public; and,
- Interest Group-Vested.

The first body of literature to be reviewed is the record of debates – *Hansard* – in the legislative assemblies across Canada. Three reports have been posted, and a fourth is in progress.

- [REPORT 1: Terms of Reference for a Survey of Speakers about 'Misinformation' Rulings in Canada's Legislative Assemblies](#) (January 25, 2021)

- [REPORT 2: Survey of Speakers about 'Misinformation' Rulings in Canada's Legislative Assemblies](#) (February 24, 2021)
- [REPORT 3: Responses from Speakers to the Survey on 'Misinformation' Rulings in Canada's Legislative Assemblies](#) (April 2, 2021)

The driving question underlying this research component is whether Speakers' rulings and Hansard records are spreaders, limiters, or prohibitors of use of the term "misinformation" in statements made in legislative assemblies, or in statements derived from those made in legislative assemblies. Examples of the latter statements include those made by politicians outside assemblies, as well as those included in media reports.

As for the third set of reports, they were stimulated in part by COVID-19 discourse beginning in early 2020. That is, despite numerous testimonials by scientists and medical experts from dozens of related fields, as well as hospital administrators, doctors, nurses, screeners, other front-line workers, coroners, and family members of the afflicted, it was daily fare for both broadcast news media and social media to carry thousands of stories that flat-out denied, dismissed, deprecated, or depreciated references made to evidence, regardless of lack of credentials among the authors, or lack of evidence as to the authenticity of their materials and messages.

Evidence, 'schmevidence', was the mantra of many broadcast news media and social media statements, even on a matter involving deaths in the thousands. serious illnesses by the millions, hospitals and intensive care units at and over capacity, and worrisome projections about long-term effects if drastic steps are not taken to deal with that pandemic in its early stages.

Given widespread rejection of evidence in the COVID-19 situation, and the presence of the term 'misinformation' on 60 million webpages, it was recognized that an extraordinarily persuasive argument is needed to successfully make the case that absence of evidence about the reality of *misinformation* is a sound reason to reject that term. (Endnote 4)

And, it was further recognized that the argument about evidence needed to be very down-to-earth, given that the worldwide spread of COVID-19 could be denied despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, with said evidence presented in every way currently available to those in such places as universities, governments, hospitals, businesses, and accredited broadcast news media.

To pursue this line of argument, the investigation turned to the field of geography for real-world evidence, and for a very good reason:

Geography is one of two realities, the other being time, which applies to every person and thing on Planet Earth because at any point in time everybody, and everything, is somewhere, no exceptions.

One geography-based report and a ZOOM meeting slide presentation are posted, and a third report is in the design phase:

- [Using the Powers of Geographic Information and GIS to Expose the Myth of 'Misinformation'](#) (March 22, 2021)
- [HOW GEOGRAPHY and GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS EXPOSE the MYTH of 'MISINFORMATION' \(PDF\)](#) (April 9, 2021), and
- [HOW GEOGRAPHY and GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS EXPOSE the MYTH of 'MISINFORMATION' \(POWERPOINT SLIDES\)](#) (April 9, 2021)

Materials in this segment use geography, geographic information, the reality-data-information-knowledge transform process, and other tests to demonstrate that *misinformation* is a meaningless term with no connection to reality, and has nothing whatsoever to do with information.

Moreover, upon examination the term *misinformation* is also found to be a sometimes blatantly erroneous and even destructively insidious counter to informed communications and evidence-based decisions.

It is that finding which motivates this pilot study, that is, *misinformation* is not just some meaningless catchphrase. Rather, it is cause for deep concern due to the harm it has already done, and can continue to do with the support of its spreaders.

The next section identifies the contribution which each report makes to our thoughts about critiquing newspapers as a spreader of the *misinformation* pandemic.

B. Contributions of Prior Studies to Critiquing Spreaders of the *Misinformation* Pandemic: Broadcast News Media – Newspapers

It was anticipated before beginning the *misinformation* pilot studies that investigations could include literature reviews. As a result, a literature review oversight element was included in the research design for each of the following reports:

1. [DOES DONALD TRUMP HAVE THE KNOW-HOW TO SAVE THE U.S.A.?](#) (May 8, 2020)

2. [The Inescapable Truth about *Disinformation* and *Misinformation*? They have NOTHING at All to do with Information](#) (September 8, 2020)
3. [Initial Thoughts about 'Fauxinfo' as an Antidote to the 'Misinformation' Pandemic](#) (February 28, 2021)
4. [REPORT 1: Terms of Reference for a Survey of Speakers about 'Misinformation' Rulings in Canada's Legislative Assemblies](#) (January 25, 2021)
5. [REPORT 2: Survey of Speakers about 'Misinformation' Rulings in Canada's Legislative Assemblies](#) (February 24, 2021)
6. [REPORT 3: Responses from Speakers to the Survey on 'Misinformation' Rulings in Canada's Legislative Assemblies](#) (April 2, 2021)
7. [Using the Powers of Geographic Information and GIS to Expose the Myth of 'Misinformation'](#) (March 22, 2021)
8. [HOW GEOGRAPHY and GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS EXPOSE the MYTH of 'MISINFORMATION' \(PDF\)](#) (April 9, 2021)
9. [HOW GEOGRAPHY and GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS EXPOSE the MYTH of 'MISINFORMATION' \(POWERPOINT SLIDES\)](#) (April 9, 2021)

The next several pages outline how each prior report helped inform the research design for a comment on critiquing newspapers.

1. [DOES DONALD TRUMP HAVE THE KNOW-HOW TO SAVE THE U.S.A.?](#) (May 8, 2020)

The results of the investigation into Trump's know-how capability regarding U.S. federal government policies, programs, plans, and operations are that 99.9%, that is, 999 of 1,000 statements by Trump are based on intuition, revelation, anatomical sourcing, and authority; 0.1% or 1 in 1,000 is based on everyday experience or common sense; and, 0.0% or 0 in 1,000 are based on his demonstrated knowledge of science.

Examination of media statements by and about Trump reveal that he is credited with an astounding number of lies, including numerous claims about *misinformation*, which in turn generated a massive number of statements about *misinformation*.

The message received is that some and perhaps many media outlets, including newspapers, are willing spreaders of references to "misinformation" for reasons that

could be ideological or financial, for example. However, it could also be that newspapers are a lot like Trump: long on authority, intuition, revelation, anatomical sourcing, and everyday experience, but short on regard for science.

One takeaway from the Trump study, therefore, is that whenever the term “misinformation” appears in a newspaper it is prudent to assume that it has nothing to do with science, and nothing to do with information.

However, for critical evaluation of newspapers as sources of truth, each time the term “misinformation” appears, questions need to be asked of editors, letters editors, columnists, and reporters about the validity and consequences of its use. (Endnote 5.)

2. The Inescapable Truth about *Disinformation* and *Misinformation*? They have NOTHING at All to do with Information (September 8, 2020)

Using ways of knowing – science, everyday experience/common sense, intuition, revelation, anatomical sourcing, and authority – as the diagnostic tool proved to be a sound way of confirming that only science can produce information, and demonstrating that no way of knowing is found to provide any rational, substantive connection between information and *disinformation* or *misinformation*.

Consequently, opening questions which arise for broadcast news media critique purposes include:

- a. “If the terms *disinformation* and *misinformation* are not associated with information through any way of knowing, then what is the meaning of *misinformation*?”
- b. “What way of knowing is responsible for the meaning?” and,
- c. “What are the links to the research behind the meaning?”

The answers to those kinds of questions are critical to understanding how newspapers get into and get out of being spreaders of *misinformation*.

And, those answers are also critical to understanding the extent to which readers can believe reports about the news in newspapers if newspapers do not distinguish between information and that which is not information.

Or, to re-phrase, if newspapers publish the term *misinformation* which is not related to information, and has also been found meaningless, then what are readers to make of news headlines and texts containing the term? (Endnote 6)

3. Initial Thoughts about 'Fauxinfo' as an Antidote to the 'Misinformation' Pandemic (February 28, 2021)

Previous IRB reports concluded that *misinformation* is a perverse misnomer because it has nothing to do with information, and the term is best described as concocted nonsense. Numerous negative consequences arise from the *misinformation* pandemic, including depreciation of the value of science-based information in political decisions, degradation in the quality of public discourse about political decisions, and an overall decline in confidence about the truth of communications disseminated by governments, business, Internet platform organizations, and the media.

In the absence of an alternative, it appears clear that use of the term *misinformation* will continue and, similar to a pandemic, will increase at a growing rate until an antidote is found or, if that does not occur, until it runs out of victims, clients, landing places, etc.

For this situation, the search for an alternative term includes content analysis of broadcast media productions, identification of 60 terms (see Table 1) associated with *misinformation*-related statements, and derivation of the term *fauxinfo*.

Table 1. Preliminary Inventory of Nouns Referred to As, Construed As, or Presented Under the Cover of 'Misinformation'

Babble	Exaggeration	Hoax	Perjury
Bafflegab	Fabrication	Hogwash	Perversion
Baloney	Fake	Invention	Phony
Blather	Fakery	Jargon	Prevarication
Bullshit	Falsehood	Lie	Propaganda
Claptrap	Falsification	Malarkey	Rot
Crapola	Falsity	Misconception	Rubbish
Deceit	Fib	Misnomer	Scam
Deception	Fiction	Misreport	Sham
Delusion	Fraud	Misrepresentation	Smoke and mirrors
Distortion	Fraudulent	Misstatement	Snow job
Doubletalk	Garbage	Mistake	Swindle
Drivel	Gaslighting	Noise	Trick
Duplicity	Gibberish	Nonsense	Untruth
Error	Gobbledygook	Perfidy	Whopper

Fauxinfo is proposed as an antidote to the *misinformation* pandemic which is rampaging at a rapid and destructive pace through social and broadcast news media.

Because it did not seem to be a major methodological challenge to design and undertake a project to find an alternative to *misinformation*, more questions arise.

For example, what efforts have been made by broadcast media as a self-proclaimed information medium to ‘clean up its language’ regarding the use of *misinformation* on its pages?

In particular, by way of illustration, many researchers have scanned newspapers for decades in the search for stories about issues, concerns, problems, and so on.

It therefore appears the time is overdue to ask members of the newspaper profession if they have done any ‘reverse scanning’ of the literature on “misinformation”?

4. REPORT 1: Terms of Reference for a Survey of Speakers about 'Misinformation' Rulings in Canada's Legislative Assemblies (January 25, 2021)

Nine bodies of literature are identified in the study, Geography and the Media, which was undertaken in 2005 for the Council on Geographic Education, the Royal Canadian Geographical Society, and the Canadian Association of Geographers. While the intended audience for the report was academics and journalists, the broad scope of the research design involving geography and the media means the results are applicable to this pilot study

(http://www.cangeoeducation.ca/programs/geoliteracy/docs/symposium_june2005_media_wellar.pdf)

The nine bodies of literature and examples for each body are shown in Table 2. In the case of that study, the question about which body of literature to deal with first was a ‘no-brainer’. That is, the decision to watch the proceedings of the Ontario Legislative Assembly session on December 1, 2020 led to witnessing what for me was an unprecedented exchange between a government member who used the term “misinformation” and was instructed by the Acting Speaker to withdraw the term.

The Ontario legislative proceedings and the Hansard record are the first substantive sources I have located to date which raise even a bit of fuss about the use and misuse of the term ‘misinformation’, and this finding includes reviews of comments about

Indeed, because of what I regard as major shortcomings in academic-based statements that I have encountered, the rulings by Speakers appear to have far more potential than academic literature as a means to begin to dissipate the murk in which the term *misinformation* is encased. (Endnote 7)

With regard to their place in Table 2, legislative assembly speeches and comments are recorded as Hansard transcripts, which belong to the body of literature labelled Corporate/ Institutional-Public Literature.

Table 2. Examples of Bodies of Literature

- 1. Learned Literature:** Includes journals, proceedings, books, monographs, glossaries, videos, dissertations, and theses, and is published under the auspices of scholarly societies and their member disciplines. These works add to knowledge, add to ways and means of continuing to add to knowledge, employ methodologically rigorous procedures of inquiry, and are subject to a peer review process.
- 2. Popular Literature:** Includes newspapers, magazines, television, radio, Internet, and any other means of communicating with a population.
- 3. Corporate/Institutional-Public Literature:** Includes constitutions, accords, authorizations, manifestos, addresses, manuals, agreements, maps, files, tapes, records, and images produced by governments and government agencies at all levels.
- 4. Corporate/Institutional-Private Literature:** Includes certificates, deeds, permits, prospectuses, IPOs, letters of intent, maps, files, tapes, and images produced by businesses and associated enterprises.
- 5. Legal Literature:** Includes legislation, charters, statutes, and Acts produced for and by court and court-associated bodies.
- 6. Regulatory Literature:** Includes by-laws, rules of conduct, procedural manuals, etc., produced by and for various public and private agencies/enterprises.
- 7. Professional Group Literature:** Includes any of the above or other kinds of literature distributed by organizations whose members are licensed and certified as RPP, CPUQ, MCIP, GISP, CPA, CMA, MD, DDS, OLS, RN, P.Eng., LLB, and OAA.
- 8. Public Interest Group Literature:** Includes any of the above or other kinds of literature distributed by organizations whose members are not privileged beneficiaries of group activities, such as Federation of Urban Neighbourhoods, Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, community associations, Greenpeace, Capital Bike and Walk Society, Ducks Unlimited, Amnesty International, and Community Living Ontario.
- 9. Vested/Special Interest Group Literature:** Includes any of the above or other kinds of literature as well as advertising and promotional materials distributed by organizations whose members are privileged beneficiaries of group activities, frequently in monetary terms, such as the Canadian Automobile Association, Canadian Association of University Teachers, Canadian Association of Public Administrators, Mining Association of Canada, Urban Development Institute, Canadian Chamber of Commerce, and ratepayer and business improvement groups.

The premise of the research is that if a number of Speakers across Canada preclude or stringently restrict use of the term ‘misinformation’ in legislative assembly sessions, then that could be the thin edge of the wedge to induce a significant chain of events such as that outlined in the form of scenario steps as follows:

1. Speakers preclude or restrict use of the term *misinformation* in legislative sessions;
2. Politicians develop the habit of not using the term *misinformation* inside or outside legislative assemblies;
3. Politicians’ agents, including political party officials and media personnel, develop the habit of not using the term *misinformation* in representations made on behalf of politicians and parties;
4. Civil servants, and agents retained as consultants for example, develop the habit of not using the term *misinformation* in government productions, meetings with citizens, media interviews, or other communications within or without their offices;
5. Broadcast news media organizations follow the provided lead and decrease the incidence of the term *misinformation* in statements involving politicians and political parties;
6. Citizens see and hear fewer references to *misinformation* in broadcast news media stories about politicians and political parties;
7. Usage of the term *misinformation* declines in communications between politicians and citizens.

If that process unfolds as outlined, then perhaps a key first step has been taken towards lowering the likelihood of Canadian society collapsing into an abyss of communications babble whereby distinctions between information and *misinformation* (and *disinformation*) just disappear as if subsumed in some form of alternate epistemological reality.

The step pertinent to this report is # 5, that is,

Broadcast news media organizations follow the provided lead and decrease the incidence of the term *misinformation* in statements involving politicians and political parties.

And the question of particular interest to designing the critiquing algorithm process is

How to hold newspapers accountable when it comes to using a term like *misinformation* which may help sell newspapers or feed ideological

bents, but which misrepresents observable, measurable, verifiable reality?

5. REPORT 2: Survey of Speakers about 'Misinformation' Rulings in Canada's Legislative Assemblies (February 24, 2021)

Undertaking surveys as part of critiquing Speakers and other legislative assembly officials as spreaders of *misinformation* is relatively straightforward, because the record of who said what is there for all to see in *Hansard*. However, that is not the case with newspaper stories, relatively few of which are detailed word-for-word text accounts of who said what.

However, the survey of Speakers was an instructive exercise in that it was a new experience, as is the task of getting answers to questions which could inform about designing an algorithm for critiquing newspapers and, in particular, for critiquing newspaper personnel including editors, columnists, and guest contributors who to my knowledge are primarily responsible for spreading *misinformation* by their productions in newspapers. (Endnote 8)

And, it was also instructive in that we were quickly disabused of any notions about wrapping things up in a hurry, so to speak, because there are protocols, traditions, precedents, and other nuances in play that do not lend themselves to quick-and-dirty findings about why use of the term *misinformation* is acceptable or not acceptable in a particular legislative assembly.

Designing the Speaker survey alerted us to the high likelihood that newspapers will also differ in those respects, as well as in such matters as ownership, corporate structure, political affiliations, religious leanings, cultural tendencies, vested interest influences, financial considerations, and other factors.

And, that survey also alerted us to the distinct prospect that due to numerous differences among newspapers, it is likely that more than one algorithm will be necessary for effectively critiquing newspapers as spreaders of *misinformation*.

Finally, in an attempt to put Speakers' rulings in Canadian assemblies in context, a search was undertaken for international news stories about surveys on using *misinformation* in legislative assemblies. That search was not productive, but it had a serendipitous result of a different nature which is pertinent to this report.

That is, one of the keyword searches using multiple terms including "index" produced the result, "IPG Mediabrands' Latest Media Responsibility Index Proves Top Platforms Have Responded Favorably to Network's Media Responsibility Push".

(<https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20210208005547/en/IPGMediabrands%E2%80%99-Latest-Media-Responsibility-Index-Proves-Top-PlatformsHave-Responded-Favorably-to-Network%E2%80%99s-Media-Responsibility-Push>)

While the link reveals that the focus of the IPG Mediabrands ‘report is on the advertising of brands via Internet platforms, what makes it pertinent to this report is the concern about how disseminating anything associated with *misinformation* and *disinformation* could have a negative effect on an industry – including the media – which is engaged in advertising goods and services.

Given that advertising revenue is important to newspapers, the IPG Mediabrands’ report provides significant insights about variables to include in an algorithm for critiquing newspapers as *misinformation* spreaders.

6. REPORT 3: Responses from Speakers to the Survey on 'Misinformation' Rulings in Canada's Legislative Assemblies (April 2, 2021)

Canadian legislative assemblies are in general agreement about the core elements of unparliamentary language, and that the overriding emphasis is on context when arriving at a decision about whether a term is to be withdrawn.

In brief, the Speaker considers matters such as the tone and intention of the Member speaking, the person to whom the words at issue are directed, the degree of provocation, and, befitting civil discourse in a civilized society, whether or not the remarks create disorder in the assembly.

As a result, due to the importance of context, and the fact that context can have many variations, there is not a codified list of terms which, regardless of circumstance, are sufficiently egregious that they are on a DO NOT USE list.

That said, however, our searching did locate a 2011 report listing 106 terms which, according to journalist Elizabeth Thompson, you cannot say in Canadian Parliament, and another 58 expressions which are in the same pejorative vein but, apparently, are not quite as unacceptable. (<https://ipolitics.ca/2011/12/14/the-106-things-you-cant-say-in-parliament/>)

Although *misinformation* is not one of those “can’t say” terms, there are synonyms in Table 1 for *misinformation* which match those in the unparliamentary language DO NOT USE category, including ‘bullshit’, ‘deceit’, ‘distortion’, ‘falsehood’, ‘falsification’, ‘fraud’, ‘lie’, and ‘misrepresentation’, with emphasis on deliberate and intentional usage of those terms.

As for the 58 acceptable but problematic terms, most of them are lighter shades of the unacceptable terms, but the one which stands out for the purposes of this report is “misinforming”.

Three comments are pertinent to the inclusion of ‘misinforming’ on the latter list.

First, ‘misinforming’ is on the list, and questions arise as to the specifics behind its inclusion. In particular, we are talking about the language of legislative assemblies here, and not post-game chatter in the dressing room after a game of old-timer hockey.

What, exactly, then, is the basis for ruling on the term ‘misinforming’, or does the context principle preclude sharp-edged defining of a term which could be used in discourse affecting many thousands to many millions of Canadian citizens?

Second, one can engage in ‘misinforming’ by providing by false information, incomplete information, inadequate information, irrelevant information, fabricated information, misleading information, and other kinds of information which do not accurately or truthfully represent reality.

However, questions arise as to whether Speakers rule on the understanding that information is the sole basis for informing or misinforming to occur, or whether their rulings employ a broader interpretation of what can cause informing or misinforming to occur, including any of the terms in Table 1, as well those compiled by journalist Elizabeth Thompson.

Which takes us back to the condition noted above, namely, context as a primary factor affecting rulings by Speakers about parliamentary language.

Giving credit where credit is due, many politicians are adept at setting the stage to manipulate perceptions of context for just about any term in any language, and thereby escape the Speaker’s gavel. Consequently, on its face it appears to be an extremely difficult task to make the case that a standalone term or phrase is deemed unparliamentary language regardless of context.

However, if Speakers’ rulings to this date on ‘misinformation’ have been of a broad nature and the information aspect has been loosely construed to mean any kind of communication expressed in any manner about any topic, then perhaps there is room to shift ground if information is more rigorously defined.

And there are two ways that this shift could occur.

Beginning with first things first, there appears to be general agreement, even among politicians, that legislative assemblies exist to serve citizens, not politicians.

That being the case, if citizens raise issues about politicians not ‘talking plain truth’ so to speak, then it occurs the Speakers could choose to insist that politicians treat citizens with proper respect when it comes to differentiating between information and anything else which is not information. Simply put, if information is not perceived to have been expressed in a statement, then it is a simple and straightforward matter to simply comment that whatever is in a statement it is not information, and request that information be provided.

The point is that because *misinformation* has nothing whatsoever to do with information, it seems appropriate that Speakers put citizens over politicians when it comes to straight talk, and that means removing a nonsense term like *misinformation* from legislative assembly discourse. (Endnote 9)

Second, parliamentary language protocols ‘bend over backwards’ to provide a genteel, politeness-first public debate environment for federal, provincial, and territorial politicians, all of whom are in legislative assemblies as representatives of citizens.

While those protocols are important to Members, there is the matter of regard by Members for language protocols which serve citizens. By way of brief illustration, it has been found that *misinformation* is a concocted nonsense term which has nothing whatsoever to do with information. Moreover, as per Table 1, *misinformation* is associated with dozens of synonyms which have nothing to do with information, and are far from being shedders of insight or light into public policies, plans, programs, or operations.

It therefore seems eminently reasonable to expect politicians to practice self-discipline by eschewing the use of *misinformation* when speaking about or engaged in matters of public interest.

And, it also reasonable to expect elected representatives to encourage Speakers to draw the line when an assembly colleague disserves citizens by using a nonsense term in discourse rather than pertinent, verifiable information.

As for the place of citizens in this relationship, it warrants emphasizing that in literacy rankings Canada is listed as an upper-medium country, but not top-of-class.

(<https://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/Details/education/adult-literacy-rate-low-skills.aspx>)

It therefore follows that politicians, including Speakers, who are truly in service to citizens, will ensure to the best of their ability that citizens are given the straight goods all the time, every time, and that means providing them pertinent, reliable, verifiable information, or the data from which pertinent, reliable, verifiable information can be derived.

Anything less means that said politicians are dealing in one or more of the 60 *misinformation* synonyms in Table 1, and/or one or more of the synonyms provided by Elizabeth Thompson's report.

Finally, in addition to concerns about language being cause for "Disorder in the House", there are also concerns about language being cause to "Mislead the House".

The last comment brings me to thoughts about parallels between legislative assemblies and their principals on the one hand, and newspapers and their principals on the other.

Among the principals of newspapers are owners, publishers, various managers, various editors, columnists, reporters, headline writers, proofreaders, guests of various kinds including op-ed contributors, letter-to-editor writers, and anyone else who contributes to content.

And, instead of Speakers being concerned about the impacts of language on 'the House', it is presumed that newspaper principals are concerned about language impacts on readers, viewers, advertisers, and other sellers and buyers of newspaper content. (Endnote 10)

Examination of reports on journalistic ethics and standards by the Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ) (Preamble, Ethics Guidelines, and *Principles for Ethical Journalism* (<https://caj.ca/ethics-guidelines>, and <https://caj.ca/images/downloads/Ethics/principles.pdf>) reveals that they are far more comprehensive in terms of subject matter coverage, and far more detailed in specificity about reporting do's and don'ts, than are the protocols for rulings by Speakers, in large part because journalists operate in a far more diverse, dynamic, and nuanced political, social, financial, economic, legal, technological, and cultural milieu.

However, what is of import is whether examination of rulings by Speakers can contribute to critiquing newspapers as spreaders of *misinformation*, and I believe that there exists potential for movement concerning the use of *misinformation* in newspaper stories which are derived from or are based on speeches and debates in legislative assemblies.

In the Preamble (<https://caj.ca/ethics-guidelines>) there are nine general ethical principles, and the term "information" appears with the following frequencies for the respective principles:

- Accuracy (1)
- Fairness (1)
- Independence (4)

- Right to privacy (7)
- Accountability (1)
- Digital media : Special issues (1)
- Conflict of interest (0)
- Transparency (5)
- Promises to sources (1)
- Diversity (1)

There are 22 mentions of "information" in the principles, but I did not locate a definition of what is meant by the term.

Moreover, it is included in nine of the principles, and there are variations in the context which is intrinsic to each principle. However, none of the related terms – e.g., facts, truth, original, verify, credit, attribution, reliability, confirm, properly source – used in addition to information to describe the essence of principles, readily and logically lends itself to being construed as *misinformation*.

Further, principles such as accuracy, fairness, accountability, and transparency are core elements of the political conversation at all levels of government, so there is relevancy in examining Speakers' rulings for insights into critiquing newspapers as spreaders of the *misinformation* pandemic.

As for the term 'misinformation', it did not receive a mention in any of the 75 statements which elaborate the do's and don'ts of the principles, and that is likely the case because emphasis is on what must be done or should be done, and not on any and all exceptions to the principles.

Consequently, if reporters and other newspaper principals respect the ethics principles, and the 75 clauses, then the chances of *misinformation* making appearances are somewhere between zero and none.

However, several newspaper scans reveal that appearances are in fact greater than zero to none, so Speakers may have something to offer that makes newspapers' ethics practices measure up to what is expressed in the statements about ethics principles.

7. Using the Powers of Geographic Information and GIS to Expose the Myth of 'Misinformation' (March 22, 2021)

The initial series of *misinformation* reports investigated whether any evidence could be located which gave actual meaning to the term *misinformation*. No evidence was found, but absence of evidence is often not sufficient to quash notions, so we took another 'kick at the credibility can' by means of several tests to re-examine whether *misinformation* is the real deal or the stuff of myth.

The premise of this research is that if *misinformation* is not real then it is myth or, to rephrase, if *misinformation* is myth then it is not real.

And, by extension for the purposes of this report, if *misinformation* is myth then it does not belong in news headlines, editorials, columns, reports, etc., which are subject to ethics principles such as accuracy, accountability, and transparency. (Endnote 11)

My point of entry for examining information and *misinformation* as reality or myth began with identifying a sound base for the comparison. And, preferably, the search for the base would have a simple solution, rather than having to go into some field of higher analytics like multidimensional scaling.

As often occurs, the key to the answer is in the question:

Is there a reality which applies to everybody, everything, everywhere, all the time, and therefore is a sound basis for comparing *misinformation* as myth or reality with information as myth or reality?

As noted in the report, the answer to the question is in the question, which took us to the field of geography for real-world evidence, and for very good reason:

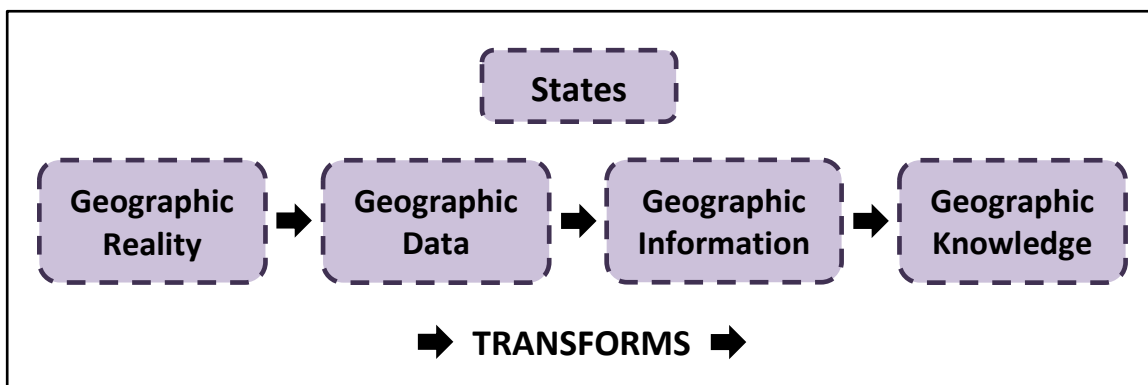
Geography is one of two realities, the other being time, which applies to every person and thing on Planet Earth because at any point in time everybody, and everything, is somewhere, no exceptions.

The research posit is that if the term *misinformation* has real meaning, then *geographic misinformation* must also have real meaning, and it can sensibly be applied to everyone and everything everywhere, all the time, on Planet Earth.

Reports in this segment use geographic reality, geographic data, geographic information, and geographic knowledge as the basis against which to measure whether *geographic misinformation* is myth or reality, and employ several tests which confirm that the idea of *misinformation* is myth at best and more akin to concocted nonsense. That being the case, it is a meaningless notion with no productive value.

By way of illustration, inserting *Geographic Misinformation* into the reality-data-information-knowledge transform process in Figure 3 makes no sense whatsoever, and puts *misinformation* totally into the myth camp.

Figure 3. The Geographic Data to Geographic Information to Geographic Knowledge Transform Process: Simple Model



Additional tests based on geography, one of just two universal realities intrinsic to every person and thing on Planet Earth, confirm that *misinformation* has no connection whatsoever to reality, or to information about reality.

A summary finding from the investigations is that the idea, notion, etc., of *geographic misinformation* is nonsensical, and has no logical, verifiable connection of any kind to geographic reality, which means that it has no applicability to anyone or anything anywhere on Planet Earth.

That being the case, and bearing in mind that 60,000,000 web pages contain the term ‘misinformation’ and its companion ‘disinformation’, questions therefore arise about the motivations, inclinations, goals, standards, ethics, practices, etc., of spreaders of the term *misinformation*.

And as per this report, those questions arise in particular in association with appearances of *misinformation* in productions of accredited broadcast news organizations in general, and newspapers in particular.

8. [HOW GEOGRAPHY and GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS EXPOSE the MYTH of 'MISINFORMATION' \(PDF\)](#) (April 9, 2021)

9. [HOW GEOGRAPHY and GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS EXPOSE the MYTH of 'MISINFORMATION' \(POWERPOINT SLIDES\)](#) (April 9, 2021)

This presentation is available as a PDF or as a deck of PowerPoint slides for the convenience of visitors to the Information Research Board website.

The materials which follow appear in Slide 1 of the Friday Lunch Discussion Club (FLDC) virtual presentation.

For the purposes of this report I invite the reader to link the individual reasons in a cumulative way to construct a chain of events going wrong, or a cascading domino effect, which is an apt description of what happened in the case of COVID-19 turning into a worldwide pandemic because it quickly got out of control in too many places due to too many failed interventions in place and time.

The slide is titled,

**Why Worry about the 'Misinformation' Pandemic?
A Short List of Reasons**

but the list format does not convey the chain of events or domino effect which is intrinsic to the idea of a pandemic.

It is therefore noted that this limitation of the static slide format is addressed in the presentation, which emphasizes the dynamics of the process associated with a pandemic.

Further, the slide prepared for the FLDC presentation focused on a brief selection of talking points that could be dealt with in short order due to time constraints.

As news reports reveal, there are many hundreds of scenarios and hence many thousands of reasons to worry about the *misinformation* pandemic.

By way of illustration, even with this brief list the order of entries can be changed, terms can be modified to broaden the scope of entries, and entries can be arranged in multiple combinations, so there is a vast number of ways that spreaders of *misinformation* statements can engage in communications chaos.

Figure 1 has the same content as slide 1, but the title is changed.

This is done to encourage readers to put their own stamp on highlighting the various elements and downsides of the *misinformation* pandemic. In section C we return to readers taking an active role in countering the *misinformation* pandemic.

**Figure 1. Why Worry About the *Misinformation* Pandemic?
Some Things to Think about if in Doubt**

Misinformation is based on false ideas

Myth is based on false ideas

Lies are false ideas.

Lies travel faster than truths

Repeated lies can become accepted as truths

Irrational people can spawn false ideas

Many people spread false ideas

Some of the best people unwittingly spread false ideas

Many people believe false ideas

False ideas breed ignorance

Science is ignored

Information is ignored

False ideas lead to bad choices

False ideas lead to bad decisions

False ideas lead to bad consequences

Pandemics of false ideas are never a good thing

One more contribution from this report should seal the argument that the notion of *misinformation* is at best sheer myth verging on total nonsense. Or, to re-phrase, if *misinformation* has any substantive reality, then it follows that it can be subject to research, including the use of research tools as shown in Figure 2 to establish its *bona fides* as is done with information in general and geographic information in particular.

Figure 2. Summary of Research Tools Used to Establish that Geographic Information Is the Real Deal

- The geographic reality ➡ geographic data ➡ geographic information ➡ geographic knowledge transform process
- Virtual representation of geographic reality through photos, images, and maps
- Numerous concepts used in geographic research to derive geographic information and geographic knowledge about spatial relationships among people, places, and things
- An array of geographic research methods, techniques and tools used to transform spatial reality ➡ spatial data ➡ spatial information ➡ spatial knowledge

As explained in detail in the primary report, we conclude with conviction that attempting to insert *misinformation* into this kind of research framework is at best an exercise in futility. (Endnote 12)

Again, when *misinformation* is put into a research framework involving certifiable reality, in this case geographic reality which applies to everybody and everything on Planet Earth, *misinformation* is aptly described as concocted nonsense.

It is appropriate to close section B with two comments about the reports.

First, it is recalled that use of the term *misinformation* began largely as a U.S. phenomenon, and had it not moved to worldwide standing as a result of U.S. world domination of Internet platforms, it would likely be characterized as a U.S. *misinformation* epidemic.

However, while *misinformation* is predominantly a U.S. figure of speech, it has achieved a virtual worldwide presence and, hence, we use the phrase pandemic to describe the extent of spreading ‘achieved’ by the term *misinformation*.

It is within that pandemic context that the focus of this report is on Canada and on critiquing Canadian newspapers, but with a real-world condition attached.

That is, due to the heavy U.S. presence in Canada on numerous news fronts – e.g., political, economic, financial, social, racial, cultural, military, environmental, entertainment, recreation, sports, –, as well as via social media, list serve, and other

digital connections, it is inevitable that that the critiquing approach will venture beyond Canada's geographic reality and into virtual space.

Consequently, we continue to use the term pandemic which has an international connotation, while expressly acknowledging that the scope of the critiquing pilot study is limited to Canadian newspapers.

As for the second comment, it arises as a consequence of feedback about an issue which concerns a number of professionals and practitioners in the information field.

In sum, the term *misinformation* has not been subjected to sufficient critical examination and exposure, leading to such results as:

- Users of the term are perceived as information experts:
- *Misinformation* is widely perceived as some kind of information even though there is no evidence to support the notion of *misinformation*: and,
- Political, medical, social, racial, environmental, ideological, and numerous other discussions involving information on the one hand and *misinformation* on the other are portrayed by *misinformation* users as the equivalent of “good arguments on both sides”.

Section C is therefore added to the research design of this pilot study to pick up on the call for information professionals and their organizations to be more proactive in taking strong and united exception to those who casually, carelessly, or deliberately use or portray the term *misinformation* as if it has a substantive connection to information.

C. Why Information Professionals Need to Play a Lead Role in Calling out Spreaders of the *Misinformation* Pandemic

As a member of the ‘information community’ for more than 50 years, I take great exception when I encounter broadcast news media items which casually, carelessly, or deliberately use or portray the term ‘misinformation’ as if it has some connection with information. (Endnote 13)

The evidence-based fact of the matter is that for decades in some fields and centuries in others, individuals, corporations, government agencies, university departments, associations, institutions, organizations, and other entities have contributed to countless bodies of information, and the 16,000,000,000 (16 billion) results for “information” that Google produces attest to the magnitude of that mission.

As for particulars of the information mission which distinguish it from the *misinformation* masquerade, they include the following.

First, there are many professional, trade, practitioner, industry, and other credentialed associations for which ‘information’ is an integral part of their identity, such as Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (<https://www.urisa.org/>), Municipal Information Systems Association (<https://www.misa-asim.ca/>), Association for Information Systems (<https://aisnet.org/>), Association of Information Technology Professionals (<https://aitp.org/>), [CompTIA Information Technology Association](#), International Association for Computer Information Systems (<https://www.iacis.org/>), Canadian Information Processing Society (<https://cips.ca/>), Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T), [Association of Independent Information Professionals \(AIIP\)](#), [Geospatial Information & Technology Association \(GITA\)](#), [Information Systems Security Association \(ISSA\)](#), Association for Geographic Information (AGI), Society for Information Management (SIM), [National Association of State Chief Information Officers \(NASCIO\)](#), Information Professionals Association (IPA), and [Cartography and Geographic Information Society \(CaGIS\)](#).

However, no credentialed association has been identified for which *misinformation* is an integral part of its identity. It appears to logically follow, therefore, that every member of accredited information-centered bodies must by definition know what information is and, by definition, should know that *misinformation* has nothing to do with information.

Second, there are thousands of professional, trade, practitioner, industry, and other associations which have education, training, research, applications, management, and other accreditation programs and courses with an ‘information’ core including, for example, Geographic Information System Professional (GISP) (<https://www.gisci.org/>).

However, no credentialed association has been identified for which *misinformation* is an integral part of its accreditation program. That being the case, and without putting too fine a point on the matter, “How does one explain the frequent media appearances of a term which, for all intents and purposes, seems to have been adopted without the benefit of logical forethought by its users?”

Third, dozens of disciplines in thousands of universities, colleges, and institutes offer programs and courses in informatics, information science, information technology, and related fields. See, for example, the work of the University Consortium for Geographic Information Science. (<https://www.ucgis.org/>)

However, no university, college, or post-secondary learning institute has been identified which offers programs or courses in *misinformatics*, *misinformation* science, *misinformation* technology, and related fields. That being the case, and despite *misinformation* having little if anything to justify giving it a first thought much less a

second, users of the term include academics as well as people with journalistic credentials.

And, fourth, countless journals, conferences, seminars, workshops, interest groups, and other enterprises are organized around such themes as advancing, applying, developing, disseminating, processing, and using information.

However, numerous searches and consultations did not locate productions of any kind that treat *misinformation* as a topic warranting in-depth study associated with information. Explanations for that absence of presence include *misinformation* being a catchphrase without substance or, as Gertrude Stein might say, “There’s no there ‘there’”. (<https://www.quora.com/What-does-there->)

The point of issue, therefore, is that despite the starkly obvious contrast and disconnect between information and *misinformation*, individuals and entities spread the term *misinformation* as if it has information-related value, despite that notion having been demonstrably dismissed as concocted nonsense.

In addition to fouling communications, however, the act of spreading the term *misinformation* has a related consequence of degrading, depreciating, and devaluing real information.

I believe that professionals have an obligation to counter what they believe to be practices which, for example, violate their codes of ethics, fail their codes of conduct and performance standards, or misrepresent their work.

Previous reports and this pilot study report express my view about the need to actively, vigorously, and publicly challenge those who engage in spreading all manner of nonsense in the name of *misinformation*.

This comment will have served its purpose if it encourages more information professionals to join in common cause to curtail the use of *misinformation* in broadcast news media, including newspapers, but with an exception.

That is, nothing good ever comes of a festering pandemic, including a festering *misinformation* pandemic. Consequently, it seems highly appropriate to use broadcast news media, including newspapers, to call out professionals and people of influence for using broadcast news media to spread the *misinformation* pandemic.

D. Initial Thoughts on Critiquing Spreaders of the *Misinformation* Pandemic: Broadcast News Media – Newspapers

Critiquing tasks are not new for me, having done many in government, academe, and consulting which use a mix of methodologies to obtain different kinds of critique outcomes for politicians, civil servants, lawyers, judges, juries, business executives, university administrators, etc. And, I have contributed to more than 1,000 media reports, news stories, columns, op-ed pieces, letters, interviews, etc., including many newspaper items, so engaging with broadcast news media is not new.

What is new, however, is designing a framework to critique newspapers as spreaders of the *misinformation* pandemic. Literature searches were not successful in locating models, guidelines, examples, etc., so in the absence of precedents this is a design-from-scratch research project, hence the ‘initial thoughts’ qualifier in the heading for section D.

As for the critique approach in general, there are several options, such as focusing on fault finding and pursuing a negative judgement, emphasizing merit recognition, working with a spectrum of positives and negatives, and, in the case of expert witness work, providing the trier of fact with an opinion that examines all the salient points presented in discovery documents, briefs, testimonials, resumes, etc., and critically evaluates them for their strengths and weaknesses.

In this case my position is explicit and I am following earlier research findings. That is, I am opposed to the term *misinformation* appearing in broadcast news stories unless, as noted above, there is an exceptional reason, so this critiquing task has a very specific focus: to design a framework which can be used to evaluate newspapers as spreaders of the *misinformation* pandemic.

There are three elements in this report on first thoughts about the critiquing framework:

- Findings from previous reports which contribute to this report;
- Questions which can be used to analyze the extent to which a newspaper contributes to spreading the *misinformation* pandemic;
- Scorecards of newspaper contributions to the *misinformation* pandemic.

1. Findings from Previous *Misinformation* Reports

What follows are findings which specifically and directly contribute to our initial thoughts on why and how to critique newspapers for their inclusion of any statements containing the term “misinformation” or ‘misinformation’ as the case may be. If the term is not a quote, then we use *misinformation* to express our view about this nonsense term.

A. Donald Trump and other politicians

One takeaway from the Trump study which has considerable applicability to a number of politicians in Canada and elsewhere, is that whenever the term “misinformation” or ‘misinformation’ appears in a newspaper along with the name of any politician, it is prudent to assume that it has nothing to do with science, and nothing to do with information.

However, for critical evaluation of newspapers as sources of truth, each time the term “misinformation” or ‘misinformation’ appears along with the name of any politician, questions need to be asked of editors, letters editors, columnists, and reporters about the validity and consequences of its use.

B. *Misinformation* has nothing to do with Information

Opening questions which arise for broadcast news media critique purposes include:

- “If the terms *disinformation* and *misinformation* are not associated with information through any way of knowing, then what is the meaning of *misinformation*?”;
- “What way of knowing is responsible for the meaning?” ; and,
- “What are the links or directions to the research behind the meaning?”

The answers to those kinds of questions are critical to understanding how newspapers get into and get out of being spreaders of *misinformation*.

And, those answers are also critical to understanding the extent to which readers can believe reports about the news in newspapers if newspapers do not distinguish between information and that which is not information.

Or, to re-phrase, if newspapers publish the term *misinformation* which has been found meaningless and is not related to information, then what are readers to make of news headlines and statements containing that term?

C. *Fauxinfo* as an antidote to *misinformation*

Fauxinfo is proposed as an antidote to the *misinformation* pandemic which is rampaging at a rapid and destructive pace through social and broadcast news media.

Because it did not seem to be a major design challenge to undertake a project to find an alternative to *misinformation*, questions arise.

For example, what efforts have been made by broadcast media as a self-proclaimed information medium to ‘clean up its language’ regarding the use of *misinformation* on its pages?

By way of illustration, many researchers have scanned newspapers for decades in the search for stories about issues, concerns, problems, trends, and so on.

It therefore appears that the time is overdue to ask members of the newspaper profession who use the term “misinformation” or ‘misinformation’, “Have you done any ‘reverse scanning’ of the literature on “misinformation” or ‘misinformation’?”

If the response is “No”, then let the critiquing begin by asking for details regarding sources of information about “misinformation” or ‘misinformation’. And, if the response is “Yes”, then asking about the source(s) used could be the start of a very informative report on contributors to the *misinformation* pandemic.

D. Terms of reference for survey of Speakers

The premise of the research is that if a number of Speakers across Canada preclude or stringently restrict use of the term ‘misinformation’ in legislative assembly sessions, then that action could induce a significant chain of events, including one involving broadcast news media:

Broadcast news media organizations follow the lead of Speakers and decrease the incidence of the term *misinformation* in published statements by and about politicians, their agents, and political parties.

Publishing statements the link ‘misinformation’ to politicians, their agents, and political parties may help to sell newspapers, and to feed ideological bents. However, if *misinformation* is used less and less frequently in legislative assemblies, and when used it is seriously circumscribed, then it follows that newspapers which are concerned about their credibility as honest brokers will do likewise.

The core point, of course, is that if newspapers do not follow the lead of Speakers on this matter, then they are opening the door to being labelled spreaders of the *misinformation* pandemic.

E. Designing the survey of Speakers

Design work for this survey revealed differences among jurisdictions regarding protocols, traditions, precedents, and other nuances that affect why use of the term *misinformation* is acceptable or not acceptable in a particular legislative assembly.

And that finding is also applicable to newspapers, as are such matters as ownership, corporate structure, political affiliations, religious leanings, cultural tendencies, vested interest influences, financial considerations, and other factors.

Consequently, we are disabused of any notion that one algorithm fits all, and appreciate why more than one algorithm will be necessary for effectively critiquing newspapers as spreaders of *misinformation*. The first thoughts approach is consistent with that received message.

Finally, a search of international news stories about surveys on using *misinformation* in legislative assemblies led us to “IPG Mediabrands’ Latest Media Responsibility Index Proves Top Platforms Have Responded Favorably to Network’s Media Responsibility Push”.

<https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20210208005547/en/IPGMediabrands%E2%80%99-Latest-Media-Responsibility-Index-Proves-Top-PlatformsHave-Responded-Favorably-to-Network%E2%80%99s-Media-Responsibility-Push>)

Given that advertising revenue is important to newspapers, the IPG Mediabrands’ report provides significant insights about variables to include in an algorithm for critiquing newspapers as *misinformation* spreaders. Many of the variables are incorporated in questions in the next section.

F. Responses from Speakers

At a general level there is a major difference between how language is perceived by Speakers and by producers of newspapers.

Two common concerns of Speakers are language that could be cause for “Disorder in the House”, or that could be cause for one Member complaining about another Member attempting to “Mislead the House”.

Conversely, newspapers are on the other side of this issue, because mention of disorder in politics, sports, weather, stock markets, trade balances, energy supplies, COVID-10 vaccination plans, celebrity relationships, etc., is the stuff of news and sells newspapers.

Further, mentions of attempts to mislead readers, citizens, law enforcement, judges and juries, Canada Revenue, regulatory bodies, consumers, etc., are also the stuff of news, and sell newspapers.

It might seem, therefore, that we are in two different worlds, whereby Speakers are likely to oppose use of the term *misinformation* if it is seen to be a source of disorder or

claims about misleading an assembly, and newspapers are likely to be okay with the term if it sells newspapers, subscriptions, etc.

However, research reveals that when it comes to use of a term such as *misinformation*, there are in fact parallels between legislative assemblies and their principals on the one hand, and newspapers and their principals on the other.

Among the principals of newspapers are owners, publishers, various managers, various editors, columnists, reporters, headline writers, proofreaders, guests of various kinds including op-ed contributors, letter-to-editor writers, and anyone else who contributes to content.

And, instead of Speakers' concerns about the impacts of language on 'the House', the focus shifts to newspaper principals' concerns about language impacts on readers, viewers, advertisers, and other sellers and buyers of newspaper content.

Examination of reports on journalistic ethics and standards by the Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ) (Preamble, Ethics Guidelines, and *Principles for Ethical Journalism* (<https://caj.ca/ethics-guidelines>, and <https://caj.ca/images/downloads/Ethics/principles.pdf>) reveals that they are far more comprehensive in terms of subject matter coverage, and far more detailed in specificity about reporting do's and don'ts, than are the protocols for rulings by Speakers, in large part because journalists operate in a far more diverse, dynamic, and nuanced political, social, financial, economic, legal, technological, and cultural milieu.

However, the question of import to this report is whether examination of rulings by Speakers can contribute to critiquing newspapers as spreaders of *misinformation*. Findings suggest that there is one domain on particular which is made to order in terms of where to start this comparative analysis. That is, to focus on:

Statements about *misinformation* in newspaper stories that are derived from or are based on speeches and debates in legislative assemblies.

In the Preamble (<https://caj.ca/ethics-guidelines>) there are nine general ethical principles, and the term "information" appears with the following frequencies for the respective principles:

- Accuracy (1)
- Fairness (1)
- Independence (4)
- Right to privacy (7)
- Accountability (1)

- Digital media: Special issues (1)
- Conflict of interest (0)
- Transparency (5)
- Promises to sources (1)
- Diversity (1)

There are 22 mentions of “information” in the principles, but I did not locate a definition of what is meant by the term. Moreover, it is included in nine of the principles, and there are variations in the context which is intrinsic to each principle. However, none of the terms – e.g., facts, truth, original, verify, credit, attribution, reliability, confirm, and properly source – , used in addition to information to describe the essence of principles readily and logically lends itself to being construed as *misinformation*.

Further, principles such as accuracy, fairness, accountability, and transparency are core elements of the political conversation at all levels of government, so there is relevancy in examining Speakers’ rulings for insights into critiquing newspapers as spreaders of the *misinformation* pandemic.

As for the term ‘misinformation’, it did not receive a mention in any of the 75 statements which elaborate the do’s and don’ts of the principles, and that is likely the case because emphasis is put on what must be done or should be done, and not on any and all exceptions to the principles.

Consequently, if reporters and other newspaper principals respect the ethics principles, and the 75 clauses, then the chances of *misinformation* making appearances are somewhere between zero and none.

However, several newspaper scans reveal that appearances are in fact greater than zero to none, so Speakers may have something to offer that makes ethics practices measure up to what is expressed in ethics principles.

G. Geographic tests exposing the myth of *misinformation*

A summary finding from the investigations is that while geographic information is the real deal for everyone and everything on Planet Earth, the idea, notion, etc., of geographic *misinformation* is nonsensical in every way, shape, or form, and has no logical, verifiable connection of any kind to geographic reality, which means that geographic *misinformation* has no rational applicability to anyone or anything anywhere on Planet Earth.

That being the case, and bearing in mind that 60,000,000 web pages contain the term ‘misinformation’ and its companion ‘disinformation’, questions therefore arise about the

motivations, inclinations, goals, standards, ethics, practices, etc., of spreaders of the term *misinformation*.

And as per this report, those questions arise in particular in association with appearances of *misinformation* in productions of accredited broadcast news organizations in general, and newspapers in particular which for many decades have featured words, numbers, images, photographs, maps and other geographic representations in stories.

Given 60,000,000 web page mentions, if there are logical representations of geographic *misinformation* then it seems they should be relatively easy to locate. Not so, it appears, and numerous scans of newspaper issues have similarly proven unsuccessful.

It therefore seems fair to say that if newspapers cannot produce evidence of geographic *misinformation*, then its references to *misinformation* are without substance at best, and self-paint newspapers as spreaders of *misinformation*.

H. Illustration of how spreading the myth of *misinformation* could spell the demise of newspapers

Among other factors, the standing of broadcast news media, including newspapers, is defined by regard for reality and truth.

The virtual presentation to the Friday Lunch Discussion Club (FLDC) included an illustrative list of reasons to be concerned about the *misinformation* pandemic. Guests were invited to consider the reasons in a cumulative manner, such as by perceiving them as a chain of events gone wrong, or a cascading domino effect, which is an apt description of what happened in the case of COVID-19 turning into a worldwide pandemic because it quickly got out of control in too many places due to too many failed interventions in place and time.

Several of the reasons are repeated, with a comment about the implications of each reason for the standing of newspapers.

Misinformation is based on false ideas – Tabloids print that stuff.

Myth is based on false ideas – Tabloids revel in that stuff.

Lies are false ideas – Telling the truth a million times as a rule is not news because it is expected, but allowing or committing a single lie and there can be no end of grief for accredited news productions.

Lies travel faster than truths – It has been suggested that repeating lies is much more popular than sharing truths, hence the difference in rates of diffusion. Nowadays in a digital world, and returning to the top of list, spreading lies by claims involving statements about *misinformation* can do a lot of credibility damage to individuals and to newspapers within mere moments of sending or posting a story. (Endnote 14)

People like to share the ‘Wow’ stuff. However, stories about a balance of trade shift, or a new kind of road paving material, are in the ‘Meh’ category and not likely to garner a lot of sharing activity, or put credibility at risk.

Repeated lies can become accepted as truths – Journalists know better than most about the challenge of writing an editorial or an investigative piece questioning a received truth which is based on a lie that is repeated multiple times by one person, or multiple times by multiple persons.

Irrational people can spawn false ideas – The integrity of newspapers is frequently challenged as a result of the amount of exposure given to people who have no substantive credentials of any kind, and engage in spreading statements about *misinformation* that cause civil disruption and disorder but, apparently, sell newspapers. Valuing freedom of speech is one thing, providing a forum for spreading *misinformation* is more than questionable. (Endnote 15)

Many people spread false ideas – Social media is widely regarded as a medium made to measure for false ideas because the overwhelming majority of comments are based on revelation, intuition, authority, anatomical sourcing, personal views about common sense, and relatively few are based on science. In my experience a social media mentality has drifted into the newspaper medium over the past decade, and particularly in the digital versions which invite non-moderated comments from viewers.

Some of the ‘best’ people unwittingly spread false ideas – While there is relative quickness in exposing so-called quacks, whackos, loose cannons, nutbars, outcasts, fringe groups, etc., as spreaders of false ideas, there is relative slowness in newspapers taking serious, sustained issue with people of substance including politicians, medical professionals, bureaucrats, academics, charity organizers, public interest group officers, and religious leaders who engage in spreading false ideas.

As a case in point, Ontario’s provincial government consultation regarding accountability of municipal politicians is receiving minimal newspaper coverage, whereas social media is relatively active on this topic. (<https://www.ontario.ca/form/survey-strengthening-accountability-municipal-council-members>) (Endnote 16)

Questions therefore arise about ethics in the newspaper industry when it falls silent on matters involving vested interests such as governments which are advertising clients of all media, including newspapers.

Many people believe false ideas – According to Google, there is a vast industry engaged in commenting on the question, *How many people believe false ideas?* At the time of this writing in May, 2021, a Google search yields a result of 598,000,000 webpages devoting attention to the matter of people believing false ideas. After reviewing several hundred entries which involve studies around the Google search question, it appears fair to say that close to the entirety of adults in Canada believe in one or more false ideas. That being the case, if newspapers do not wish to promote the spread of false ideas, such as that of statements about *misinformation*, then it appears they are going to have to double down on their resolve as gatekeepers for truth in news.

Science is ignored – The core missions of science which are to add to knowledge, and add to ways and means of continuing to add to knowledge, are more often a hard slog than a walk in the park, and many in science have experienced the glazing over of eyes at the mention of methodologically designed research. Because it is so much easier to arrive at an opinion or accept an opinion by using intuition, revelation, authority, anatomical sourcing, or personal notions of common sense, there are reasons for some to ignore science. However, regard for science is one characteristic that separates newspapers from tabloids and social media, and that condition requires deep-sixing the term *misinformation* which has nothing whatsoever to do with science.

Information is ignored – For all the preceding reasons and comments, if information produced by science is ignored in favour of *fauxinfo* produced by intuition, revelation, authority, anatomical sourcing, and personal notions of common sense, then a tipping point comes into play.

That is, when information and *misinformation* are given equal regard, then newspapers cease to be newspapers and become tabloids for all intents and purposes.

These are some of the research findings which specifically and directly contribute to our initial thoughts about why and how to critique newspapers for their inclusion of any statements containing the term “misinformation” or *misinformation* as the case may be.

The next section builds on those findings to propose a first approximation of a set of questions that critique newspapers as spreaders of the *misinformation* pandemic. And, as a relevant by-product, it appears that these kinds of questions may assist in distinguishing newspapers from tabloids.

2. First Approximation of Questions to Critique Newspapers as Spreaders of the *Misinformation* Pandemic

There are quality and quantity aspects to examining and documenting the spreader activity, and it is necessary that the questions have regard for both aspects. Moreover, the initial questions are likely to be set-up questions which are used in subsequent rounds of examination to derive a more rigorous algorithm or algorithms.

For ease of identification, the questions are listed as Q1, Q2, Q3, etc.

Q1. Under what circumstances is the term *misinformation* used?

Q2. Who are the accepted users of the term?

Q3. Which users if any are challenged, and why?

Q4. In the interest of balance, which term balances *misinformation*?

Q5. In the interest of balance, how is an argument involving misinformation balanced?

Q6. Is *misinformation* defined?

If not, why not?

Q7. Is use of the term *misinformation* accepted at face value?

If, yes, why?

Q8. Is use of the term *misinformation* explained?

If so, how?

If not, why not?

Q9. Is use of the term *misinformation* challenged?

If so, how?

If not, why not?

Q10. Is evidence of *misinformation* provided?

If so, how?

If not, why not?

Q11. Is evidence of *misinformation* requested?

If not, why not?

Q12. Is the source of the *misinformation* statement confirmed?

If so, how?

If not, why not?

Q13. Are mentions of *misinformation* regular or irregular?

Q14. Are mentions of *misinformation* frequent or seldom?

Q15. Are mentions of *misinformation* prominent or subdued?

Q16. Are mentions of *misinformation* in sensational or run-of-the-mill stories?

Q17. Are mentions of *misinformation* in headlines or text?

There are a number of considerations that go into designing an algorithm to digitally examine newspapers as spreaders of the *misinformation* pandemic. Materials presented in the preceding sections are talking points to take into account, with emphasis on asking questions which are readily translated into rules or instructions for examining digital newspapers – current issues or archived records – as the case may be.

3. Scorecards of Newspaper Contributions to the *Misinformation* Pandemic

Examination of newspaper articles containing the term *misinformation*, suggest that there are several design options available, ranging from simple frequency systems to systems which combine quantitative and qualitative metrics.

In both cases the kinds of questions raised in section 2 above are applicable in terms of measuring amounts of spreading activity, and the impacts of that activity.

Based on experience to date, it will take several months to obtain sufficient directive feedback on the questions posited in section 2, and then another month or so to design and test the first set of scorecards, beginning with frequency variables.

E. Closing Comment

The *misinformation* narrative has a long history which, courtesy of advances in computer-communications and the Internet, has increasingly spread across much of the international domain. Hence, the reference to pandemic is appropriate.

However, in this research we deal with a very small part of the international scene, namely, critiquing Canadian newspapers, but with a real-world condition attached.

That is, due to the heavy U.S. presence in Canada on numerous news fronts – e.g., political, economic, financial, social, racial, cultural, banking, military, environmental, public safety, resources, entertainment, recreation, and sports – as well as via social media, list serve, and other digital connections, it is inevitable that that the critiquing approach ventures beyond Canada’s geographic reality and into virtual space.

Again, while we use the term pandemic which has an international connotation, it is emphasized that the scope of the critiquing pilot study is limited to Canadian newspapers.

F. Next Steps

It is more than 15 years since the report on Geography and the Media was presented at a joint session of the Council on Geographic Education, the Royal Canadian Geographical Society, and the Canadian Association of Geographers.

(http://www.cangeoeducation.ca/programs/geoliteracy/docs/symposium_june2005_media_wellar.pdf)

Over the intervening years, I published more materials linking geography, GIS, and the media, with emphasis on the importance of geographic reality, geographic data, geographic information, and geographic knowledge to media stories about people and places and their activities, interactions, and relationships at the local, regional, national, and international scales.

The present research continues that tradition, but with a twist. That is, I use geographic reality, geographic data, geographic information, geographic knowledge, and geographic information systems science and technology to counter the notion of *misinformation* and, subsequently, they are used in follow-on research as an antidote to counter the *misinformation* pandemic.

This report is part of the follow-on to those earlier investigations, and involves initial thoughts about critiquing newspapers as spreaders of the *misinformation* pandemic.

The current plan is to ‘test drive’ the report over the next several months.

One project now in the design phase involves contacting a small selection of authors who published *misinformation* statements in newspaper stories, as well as a small selection of newspapers which published the *misinformation* statements.

G. Endnotes

Endnote 1. To be clear, it is not a ‘slam dunk’ to hold accredited news bodies accountable for a perceived failure to meet performance standards, but there is an opportunity to do so through a third party hearing before a press council or related

body. To my knowledge this is not an option with social media in Canada or other free and democratic societies.

Endnote 2. General invitations to correct an erroneous impression on my part have not resulted in receiving the solicited evidence. In a follow-on project I will specifically contact users of the term.

Endnote 3. To give credit where credit is due, both Shakespeare’s play about ‘nothing’ and the Seinfeld fixation about ‘nothing’ continue to have tremendous mental, emotional, and entertainment upsides, but to date no upside of any kind has been found in association with *misinformation*, only numerous downsides.

Endnote 4. Several hours examining social media commentary or an hour reviewing critiques of social media commentary establish without question that evidence-based logical thinking, critical reasoning, etc., often have little to do with what many people believe, even with fact upon fact upon fact, ad infinitum, ‘staring them in the face’, so to speak. This report is logic-based, and no attempt is made to try to reach non-thinkers, namely, those who do not subscribe to rational thought. It is appreciated, however, that in order to slow, turn, quell or otherwise diminish use of the term *misinformation*, one step in the process is to provide readily understandable, real-world evidence which demonstrates that *misinformation* is a concocted term that at best is without substance.

Endnote 5. Reporters are the only members of the newspaper industry who are ‘bound’ by ethics principles, a matter which is discussed later in the report. That means other newspaper contributors such as publishers, editors, editorial writers, columnists, features writers, and managers, as well as guest editors, op-ed authors, and letter writers are not similarly bound.

Endnote 6. The term news as used here refers to reports about actual non-trivial situations, events, initiatives, outcomes, etc., which can be validated, verified, and examined, and excludes what may be described as half-baked fabrications and foolish personal contentions which are the stuff of tabloids.

Endnote 7. Academics have contributed to news stories containing the term *misinformation*. The design for a survey of academics who use the term *misinformation* is in progress.

Endnote 8. Again, ethics principles apply to reporters, not to these individuals, which means there are lots players to publish non-substantive mischief like *misinformation*.

Endnote 9. The evidence is clear that Speakers do not engage in before-the-fact interventions about what can be said during speeches and debates, and are models of restraint in that regard. However, and as previously discussed ([DOES DONALD](#)

[TRUMP HAVE THE KNOW-HOW TO SAVE THE U.S.A.?](#); [The Inescapable Truth about *Disinformation* and *Misinformation*? They have NOTHING at All to do with Information](#); and [Initial Thoughts about 'Fauxinfo' as an Antidote to the 'Misinformation' Pandemic](#)), there have been numerous changes in language use throughout society in recent years, many of them driven by politicians. As a result, it seems reasonable to suggest that Speakers and legislative assemblies could and should take on a more active role in making sure that designations of unparliamentary language are done to better serve citizens, such as by adding 'misinformation' to the DO NOT USE list.

Endnote 10. I am not aware of reports containing this kind of evidence, and I can only guess about how to search for such evidence, which accounts for using 'presumed' in writing it is "...presumed that newspaper principals are concerned about language impacts on readers, viewers, advertisers, and other sellers and buyers of newspaper content."

Endnote 11. For readers wishing to probe the myth-reality connection, Google may be of assistance by directing you to some 29.000.000 webpages.

Endnote 12. Given that there are about 60 million webpages with references to *misinformation* and *disinformation*, and that a lot of people have gone down the *misinformation rabbit hole*, it will come as no surprise if attempts are made to invent an alternate reality to accommodate the *misinformation* myth and nonsense. A follow-on study will query a selection of academics in this regard.

Endnote 13. Taking exception is one thing, and taking an advocacy position is quite something else. However, shortly after beginning the *misinformation* research program, consultations with others in the information field concluded that there is a need for serious advocacy to counter the upsurge in *misinformation* statements spawned in the U.S., courtesy of Donald Trump and his acolytes including, for example, Fox News and a group of talk radio hosts. The prevailing argument was that having been appointed Member, Order of Canada, "For extensive contributions to the development and advancement of geographic information science and geographic information systems", I had an obligation to take on an advocacy role.

Endnote 14. Again, our interest is in accredited news organizations and not tabloid-level media operations which have a different take on credibility. That is, they and their readers, viewers, listeners, etc., associate credibility with producing a steady stream of claims maligning disliked celebrities, politicians, sports figures, ethnic groups, racial groups, nationalities, etc., by whatever means are available, so spreading *misinformation* is both a staple and an identifier of these outfits.

Endnote 15. Irrational people are variously described as making claims which are absurd, baseless, foolish, groundless, illogical, ludicrous, ridiculous, silly, unfounded, unjustifiable, unreasonable, unsound, etc., and are only one subset of the people who spawn false ideas as a product of ‘knowing’ by authority, intuition, personal common sense, revelation, or any other non-science way of knowing.

Endnote 16. It is noteworthy in this regard that while newspapers across Ontario appear to be largely silent about the consultation to hold municipal politicians accountable, there is little evidence that any news medium, including newspapers, is holding the Ministry of Municipal Affairs accountable for how it is failing to properly inform citizens about the consultation process, or to inform them in a timely manner about the body of materials received in response to the survey.