

# Journalists fighting media-bullying populists

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Journalists and media researchers gathered at the panel “[How to report on lying media-bullying populists](#)” to discuss how media can fight against populists and media bullies and how journalists can regain the public’s trust in times of “lies” and false news.

At a time when political figures bully media and question the norms of acceptable behaviour, media should debate how to cover such figures and report on their declarations, particularly when false, [Mathew Ingram](#), writer for [Fortune Magazine](#), explained. According to Ingram, if journalists do not call out such behavior, they will end up normalizing it, hence, permitting even worse behaviour. He cited as an example the psychological principle of “overtone window” where norms of behaviour are set, and if someone, like Trump for instance, shifts this window to the extreme, by lying or making racist remarks, it eventually moves the boundaries of acceptable behaviour towards the extremes.

[Lucy Marcus](#), CEO of Marcus Ventus Consulting, asked Ingram whether this normalization of extremist views could be further pursued by Trump and if others were likely to follow his example. In his response, Ingram pointed out the “comical but also horrifying” recent example of China where the restriction of the press by Trump was interpreted as: “Well, if he

can do it we can do it too.” [...] “To have China pointing at you as a bad example is a pretty horrifying place for US to be,” Ingram highlighted.

[Geneva Overholser](#), an independent journalist in New York City, explained her views on how journalists have to cover presidency like Trump’s and how they can rebuild trust in media. She highlighted how essential the connection between engagement, trust, and collaboration is. She also warned that every journalist should keep in mind the motto: “It’s all about the public.” According to her, the main fault with journalists nowadays is that they have detached from the public: “The more we built our self-esteem and self-regard, the farther we have got from the understanding we exist to serve the public.”

Overholser shared some simple practical steps that journalists should take in order to get closer to readers and rebuild trust in media. First, she said, the job of every journalist is not to give voice to the powerful ones but rather to nourish the public’s understanding. Second, journalists should engage the audience to make people feel that it is for them. Third, journalists should collaborate and always go in depth, beyond fact-checking; for instance, they should examine what new policies have been offered and what impact they have on the public.

Talking about the news cycle in the US, [Craig Silverman](#), media editor at [BuzzFeed News](#), said that “it has collapsed as never before” because almost everything in the news is about Trump and this simply propagates Trump’s agenda. In order to challenge that, journalists need their “own supporting infrastructure,” as Silverman called it, and one part of it is “your own media propagation force.”

The panelists also discussed the topic of lies in media and how journalists can deal with that. [Stefan Wolff](#), professor of international security and director of research and knowledge transfer at the [College of Social Sciences at the University of Birmingham](#), agreed with the concept that “It’s all about the public” when it comes to journalism, which was mentioned by Overholser, and explained that it is the people who are affected by the lies told in media. Wolff called to fight against this “very crafty web of lies and half-truths.” In his view, the best way for journalists to do so is to make sure they always check facts and confront lies of varying degrees.

Lastly, [Ben de Pear](#), editor at [Channel 4 News](#), elaborated that the whole problem with media bullying dates back to times prior to Trump: for instance, there were “lies” back in 2003 when the US went into war with Iraq without having verified the presence of weapons of mass destruction there. Finally, de Pear advised journalists when they cover Trump not to get caught up in his rhetoric or personality, stop talking about the media itself endlessly, and stick to the facts.

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