

<b>Institution:</b> Manchester Metropolitan University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> D32 Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Visual Media Literacy for Combating Misinformation		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2013–2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Farida Vis Simon Faulkner Karen Pashby	Professor of Digital Media Senior Lecturer in Art History & Visual Culture Reader in Education	2017–present 1995–present 2016–present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2013–2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Tackling misinformation is an ongoing global challenge that is even more pressing since the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in a rise in health-related misinformation. The Visual Social Media Lab (VSML), directed by <u>Vis</u>, is at the forefront of innovation on practical interventions that address the timely challenges of visual misinformation. Innovative interdisciplinary impact activities by the VSML resulted in the 'Questioning Images' resource (QI), which underpinned election related media literacy campaigns in Canada and Colombia (in 2019). These activities have made a difference through reaching ca. 9,000 teachers, 1.2m pupils, in 70% of all schools in Canada and 199 schools, 76,000 pupils in Colombia by raising awareness of the dangers of visual misinformation as well as teaching tangible skills to identify such images. In the UK, the VSML's rapid response to Covid-19 misinformation produced a teacher's guide and trained 80 teachers in a School Trust in Manchester, reaching 1,600 pupils. Evidence of impact was established through teacher surveys, focus groups, interviews and individual accounts. These highlighted that almost all teachers had improved their ability to identify mis- and disinformation as well as their understanding of the danger images play in spreading it. Significant longer-term improvement in pupils' skills and positive changes within the school environment were reported as well, including improved critical thinking skills. Given the threat of misinformation to modern democratic processes, informing the curricula upon which public education will depend for years to come represents important impact. VSML research and impact activities have shaped national and international policy, practice, thinking and making in the UK, Canada and Finland.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>The research involves interdisciplinary collaborative work that brings together expertise from Media and Social Media Studies (<u>Vis</u>), Art History and Visual Culture (<u>Faulkner</u>), and Education and Global Citizenship Studies (<u>Pashby</u>). Their body of work has created a space within emerging academic research on social media for the study of social media images, a significantly overlooked aspect in the field. Work by <u>Faulkner</u> and the VSML developed methods for analysing images from social media, specifically in the aftermath of crises [1]. The work has also focused on specific genres of social media images and how to systematically study those internationally [2] as well as examining the wide circulation of individual high-profile news images and provide new methods and approaches for their study, such as the image of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian boy whose image(s) made global headlines after he drowned on 2nd September 2015 in the Mediterranean Sea along with his mother and brother [3]. The research highlights that communication on social media is overwhelmingly visual and that images therefore require standalone attention. This has continued in analysis of the online visual cultures of the Black Lives Matter movement [4].</p> <p>Based on this ground-breaking research, in 2017 <u>Vis</u> collaborated with First Draft (a globally leading US-based initiative that fights mis- and disinformation through research, training and education) to study the role of images in spreading mis- and disinformation as part of 2017 UK</p>		

and French national elections. In October 2017, this research accessed data from two First Draft-led election projects; *Cross-Check* (France) and fact checking organisation *Full Fact* (UK). Both projects were engaged with identifying misleading stories in the run up to these elections. These stories then formed the basis for VSML research, which examined 95 misleading image-led stories. This work developed a typology for visual mis- and disinformation, identifying the types of misleading images most frequently shared and what was misleading about them. This generated potential indicators that could be used to identify problematic content. The most significant misleading type of image involved unaltered 'true' photographs with a false, misleading context.

Subsequently, a series of five VSML workshops were held across three continents, involving 40 high-level stakeholders from journalism, which led to the development of the '20 Questions Framework for Interrogating the Social Media Image' (20Q Framework), which was launched at MisInfoCon in London in October 2018. The development of the framework was in part based on the re-purposing of art historical methods for analysing single works of art to the study of social media images involving misinformation. This work led to a chapter in the ground-breaking and updated *Verification Handbook* that concentrates on the need to move beyond practises that are solely based in image verification, in order to equip journalists with the skills to deeply question the context of social media images and thus support more accurate reporting [5]. Following the launch of the 20Q Framework a further phase of research initiated the implementation of the framework in Canada and Colombia. *Pashby's* work on Global Citizenship Education and the development of teaching resources in Canada [6] has been crucial in further developing the 20Q Framework within an education context, enabling the development of the QI resource.

### 3. References to the research

1. **Vis, F., Faulkner, S.**, Parry, K., Manyukhina, Y., and Evans, L. (2013), 'Twitpic-ing the riots: analysing images shared on Twitter during the 2011 riots', in Weller, K., Bruns, A., Burgess, J., Mahrt, M., and Puschmann, C. (Eds.), *Twitter and Society*, New York: Peter Lang.
2. Thelwall, M., Goriunova, O., **Vis, F., Faulkner, S.**, Burns, A., Aulich, J., Mas-Bleda, A., Stuart, E., and D'Orazio, F. (2016) 'Chatting through Pictures? A Classification of Images Tweeted in one week in the UK and USA', *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 67(11): 2575-2586
3. **Faulkner, S., Vis, F.**, and D'Orazio, F. (2017), 'Analysing Social Media Images', in Marwick, A., Burgess, J., and Poell, T., *Sage Handbook of Social Media*, London and New York: Sage.
4. **Vis, F., Faulkner, S.**, Noble, S., & Guy, H. (2020). When Twitter Got #woke: Black Lives Matter, DeRay McKesson, Twitter, and the Appropriation of the Aesthetics of Protest. In McGarry A., Erhart I., Eslan-Ziya H., Jenzen O., & Korkut U. (Eds.), *The Aesthetics of Global Protest: Visual Culture and Communication* (pp. 247-266). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. doi:10.2307/j.ctvswx8bm.18
5. **Vis, F., Faulkner, S.**, and Guy, H., 'Verifying and Questioning Images', in Silverman, C., *Verification Handbook: For Disinformation and Media Manipulation* <https://datajournalism.com/read/handbook/verification-3>
6. Shultz, L.; **Pashby, K.**; and Godwaldt, T. (2017). Youth Voices on Global Citizenship: Deliberating Across Canada in an On-line Invited Space. *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning*, 8 (2), 5–17.

#### Funding:

- G1.** Department of Canadian Heritage (Digital Citizen Contribution Program) funding (CAD214,000, GBP114,000)
- G2.** Luminate funding (USD10,000). This is a philanthropic organisation based in the US.

### 4. Details of the impact

#### International impact on visual media literacy

Key impact of this research has been in visual media literacy, which has involved targeted impact activities in three countries: in Canada and Colombia focused on the role of visual misinformation in elections (2019); in the UK in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic (2020).

## Canada

Due to the growing threat to democratic processes, especially in relation to the 2019 Federal Elections, the Canadian government have prioritised funding research and interventions to tackle the impact of misinformation on democracy. Canadian NGO CIVIX (non-partisan, national registered charity dedicated to building the skills and habits of active and engaged democratic citizenship among young Canadians) was awarded funding and applied it to update the flagship Student Vote (SV) programme. To ensure this included state of the art materials on media literacy to tackle misinformation they engaged in a global search to identify potential new resources. CEO Taylor Gunn states that the 20Q Framework was chosen because 'we thought it was genuinely unique, no other people were talking about images like this or using these examples and we had an instinct that this framework and working with images could be incredibly attractive to teachers. And also to students, including younger grades because it is so accessible' [A]. During 2019, the VSML worked closely with CIVIX to translate the 20Q Framework into an innovative and timely teaching resource: *Questioning Images* (QI). QI became part of SV for the Canadian Federal Elections (October 2019) and was engaged with by over 1.2m young Canadians, involving more than 9,000 schools and upwards of 25,000 teachers, covering 70% of all schools in Canada [A]. QI has also been supported by Election Canada, the independent, non-partisan agency responsible for conducting federal elections and referendums. QI consists of two versions (Elementary and High School) and exists in English and French. A workshop was developed to introduce it to teachers, which was demonstrated at eight boot camps in Canada (ca.1,500 participants), of which three were delivered by Vis. In evaluating the 2019 SV programme, CIVIX found that 20% of teachers (5,000) had taught QI and used the materials, meaning that it was actively taught to as many as 240,000 pupils. For CIVIX this was the first close collaboration with academia in terms of resource-led development and it has contributed to how the organisation thinks about evaluating programmes and interventions. CIVIX CEO Taylor Gunn confirms: 'ultimately it was Farida's research that made QI possible for us and it's been a really exciting, powerful but also fun partnership. QI was consistently the biggest hook at our boot camps' [A]. In early 2020 the VSML secured funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage's Digital Citizen Contribution Program to further develop the partnership between the VSML and CIVIX. This research also involves The University of Alberta (Shultz). This grant (CAD214,000) has been awarded to fully assess the impact of QI during 2020-2021. Chris Beall, Director, Strategic Policy and Research in the Broadcasting and Digital Communications Branch at Canadian Heritage has stressed that this is 'important and timely work' [B]. Our impact survey (n=77) shows that almost all teachers agreed the framework improved their ability to identify mis- and disinformation (96.2%) as well as their ability to identify how images play a role in spreading mis- and disinformation (97.5%). Further focus groups with teachers (n=17), highlighted that they had used QI repeatedly since 2019, often as the first media literacy lesson for the year; and used it across all subject areas. They had often also recommended QI to colleagues teaching other subjects, including between schools. Almost all reported increased confidence in questioning images themselves and reported a range of skills improvements in their students, including those not directly related to misinformation detection. These included being able to debate issues better and present arguments more coherently, more sustained interest in this resource than they had expected, as well as the ability and confidence to inform and challenge the opinions of others. A great example was shared by Toronto District School Board teacher Christina Ganey, who explained that her students had questioned a guest speaker from the Toronto Public Library and introduced her to QI as a more up to date and sophisticated approach to addressing misinformation: 'That to me is really a measure of success; that they remember and that they can apply it in a different context, which is what as teachers we're always looking for. And that's one thing that Questioning Images does very successfully. So, there's a success story that's incredible!' [C]. We heard many examples like this one as part of these focus groups.

## Colombia

As part of CIVIX's *Voto Estudiantil* (VE) programme for the Local Elections in Colombia in 2019, Vis joined CIVIX and partners at a teacher consultation in Bogota in May 2019, where she introduced 20Q and QI as part of a research presentation and workshop. Following this

successful workshop, QI was translated as *Analizamos Las Imágenes* and included in the 2019 VE curriculum. It was distributed to teachers during five Democracy Bootcamps in Bogotá, Buenaventura, Cali, Cartagena and Medellín. In total 603 teachers worked with this curriculum and were given a printed version of the QI framework to be used with their students. The curriculum was given to 199 schools in Colombia and 220 total campuses of those schools. In total 76,245 students cast a ballot in VE 2019, which means QI potentially reached more than 76,000 students. Manuela González, part of the CIVIX team in Medellín notes how QI has contributed to an increase in critical thinking skills amongst students: 'While we were visiting schools within the development of the *Voto Estudiantil* project, we identified that several teachers liked this activity due to it being interactive and attractive for students; some of those students started guessing the context of the images by creating stories based on the claims linked to the pictures, which were posts in social media sites. Finally, when the real context, facts and story behind the images were shown to the students, we were able to see how they had conversations where they talked about the need to think in a more critical way about the information that they receive on a daily basis through their social media, and how they could start developing skills to assess if contents are trustable or not' [D].

### United Kingdom

When the Covid-19 pandemic took hold in early 2020 and the UK entered its first lockdown, Vis reached out to Wise Owl Trust (WOT), a group of three primary schools (90 teachers, 1,600 pupils) with whom VSML had been developing a funding project for an extensive and longitudinal Visual Media Literacy intervention. These plans were put on hold when the pandemic hit, though the need for teacher resources to tackle Covid-19 related misinformation was more urgent than ever. The VSML received a small rapid response grant from philanthropic organisation Luminate (USD10,000) to quickly develop a resource for WOT. As a result, a guide for primary school teachers 'Stop. Think. Share? A Teacher's Guide to Mis- and Disinformation during the Covid-19 Pandemic' was published in May 2020 [E]. An impact survey showed that 87.5% of teachers found the guide either helpful or extremely helpful and 78.6% reported having learned something about mis- or disinformation that they did not know before reading it. The same number of teachers also believed a resource like this would be helpful to pupils and parents and 75% stated they felt more confident in their ability to recognise mis- and disinformation while 60.7% said they think more critically about the accuracy of what they share on social media. Finally, 93% stated they would like more resources like this and 96% were not aware of any other similar resources [E]. Confirming these findings, WOT CEO Sophie Murfin states: 'The guide has made staff far more aware of the issues and what can be done to tackle them. This has helped to curb anxieties around the spreading of misinformation especially associated with Covid-19 and has given them the confidence to question. The ability to pause and think about the reliability of information has had a huge effect on the school community. It has created space for open dialogue. This has in turn led to a far better culture, one of openness and transparency' [F]. One of the year 6 teachers, Sam Shaw, also notes the impact on her pupils: 'I have seen a real impact on the kids through teachers having picked up these skills. The kids in my class have become more critical of the things they see online, of the images on social media' [G]. The Manchester Director of Education has gone on to share the guide with all state-funded primary school headteachers in Greater Manchester (137 schools).

### International impact on policy and professional practice

This research has impacted policy making both nationally and internationally. The research has informed the House of Lords Select Committee Inquiry on Political Polling and Digital Media in the UK, for which Vis was invited directly to twice give oral evidence (one closed, one open session). The evidence from the public session has been extensively used in the *Politics of Polling* report (April 2018). This includes highlighting in full the case of a misleading image (from the Westminster attack in March 2017), which forms a key example in the 20Q workshops and QI lessons. Consequently, the report confirms the need for Visual Media Literacy training: 'Similarly Professor Vis spoke of the "enormous potential" of the "overhauling of the national curriculum so that we can teach young people, and all citizens, how to deal with information online"' [H]. As a result of her Visual Media Literacy research Vis was invited to join the EU's Media Literacy Expert Group (MLEG). For this, the European Commission brings together media

literacy stakeholders to meet annually to identify, document and extend good practices in the field of media literacy, facilitate networking between different stakeholders, explore synergies between different EU policies and support programmes and media literacy initiatives. In March 2019, Vis gave the keynote at the *Truth Matters: Strategies for Combating Manipulated Realities* seminar organised by Fulbright Finland and attended by leading journalists, educators and representatives from the Finnish Prime Minister's Office. Mirka McIntire Manager, Teacher Exchange and Education Programs at Fulbright confirmed the importance of this presentation, stating: 'seminar participants praised your talk and I have already shared your email address with the Finnish National Agency for Education, as one of their [Counsellors] of Education was equally impressed by your approach as we were' [I]. In August 2019, Canadian funders and policy makers The McConnell Foundation, Luminare and the Public Policy Forum convened a group of 23 experts and stakeholders from the fields of civic digital literacy and misinformation prevention under the banner *Digital Threats to Our Democracy*. Vis attended this invitation-only retreat as the only participant from Europe and the report produced from this convening confirms one of the key recommendations made by Vis on the need to 'Enrich and scale existing and nascent digital media literacy education efforts. Specifically, secure the adoption of Open Educational Resources through a combination of policy, production, implementation, and assessment efforts in order to reach a goal of universal school-age digital media literacy in ten years' (p.11 *Digital Threats to Democracy* report) [J]. Work by Vis, Faulkner and Pashby has also shaped the thinking of the McConnell Foundation and other Canadian funders as well as the Canadian Government on the importance of visual misinformation [B]. In November 2019 Vis was invited to present on Visual Media Literacy at an invitation-only workshop organised by Google and Facebook (ca. 30 participants), *Evidence in Action: Identifying Shared Research Priorities on Visual Misinformation*, demonstrating the importance of this work to technology companies who are so centrally involved in the distribution of misinformation via their platforms. In March 2020 Vis was invited (as the only European academic) to join the Advisory Board of *Reset Tech*, a new initiative, bringing together experts from politics, civil society and academia, engaged in programmatic work on technology and democracy focused on shaping policy in this area. It operates internationally to ensure that the commercial interests of big tech companies are compatible with the values of robust and resilient democracies. Executive Director Ben Scott was previously a Senior Adviser to New America in Washington DC, helping design the Public Interest Technology Initiative, and led the technology policy advisory group for the 2016 Clinton US presidential campaign. Of the Visual Media Literacy work led by Vis, he stated: 'I think your work is exceptional – at the cutting edge of the field in research on digital disinformation and informing the curricula upon which we will all depend for public education in the years to come. This issue sits at the centre of the biggest challenges we face in modern democracies' [K].

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. Testimonial, Taylor Gunn, CEO of CIVIX, Canada; project data and QI materials
- B. Testimonial, Chris Beall, Director, Strategic Policy and Research in the Broadcasting and Digital Communications Branch at Canadian Heritage
- C. Christina Ganev, Hybrid Teacher-Coach, Toronto District School Board (East York Collegiate Institute), Canada
- D. Testimonial, Manuela González, part of the CIVIX team in Medellín, Colombia; QI materials
- E. Stop. Think. Share? A Teacher's Guide to Mis- and Disinformation during the Covid-19 Pandemic guide and report; project data
- F. Testimonial, Sophie Murfin, CEO of Wise Owl Trust, Manchester
- G. Testimonial, Sam Shaw, Year 6 Teacher Briscoe Lane, Wise Owl Trust, Manchester
- H. The Politics of Polling Report (April 2018), House of Lords Select Committee Inquiry on Political Polling and Digital Media
- I. Testimonial, Mirka McIntire Manager, Teacher Exchange and Education Programs at Fulbright
- J. Digital Threats to Democracy Report: Wasan Island Retreat August 16-19, 2019
- K. Testimonial, Ben Scott, Executive Director Reset Tech