Twitter Thread by Mike Caulfield



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Some quick notes on how to be careful with what you read and share right now on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, based on SIFT, with some slight shifts in emphasis for fast-moving foreign events. ■

STOP is always the first move of SIFT, and the first question you need to ask is not "Is this true?" but "Do I even know what I'm looking at here?" Jumping immediately to questions of truth before assessing personal knowledge & capability is where most people go wrong.

STOP is *always* important, but it is particularly important with events in a foreign, fast-moving context. It's too easy to look at a video depicting events thousands of miles away in languages we do not understand shared by ppl we don't know and think "This looks legit"

Taking a moment or two (and you can do it right now!) to reflect on your limitations in this sort of context is helpful. And with each piece of content asking yourself "Do I know what I am looking at here?" becomes crucial for every piece of content.

When it comes to INVESTIGATE THE SOURCE, we look for two things: One, is source of the information likely to be what we call "in the know" -- do they have *significantly* above average knowledge of a situation because of expertise, profession, life experience, or location?

Second, is the person motivated to be "careful with the truth". This isn't about bias as much as it is about what the person's personal and professional incentives are. Basically, pick people who pay a price if they get something wrong.

Here's the thing about a fast-moving situation and sources: be extra picky. If something appears from a borderline source at 10 a.m. my life-changing advice to you is YOU CAN WAIT FOR A BETTER SOURCE. The world will not end if you tweet at 10:30 instead.

FIND BETTER COVERAGE is move three of SIFT. And there is an important modification here for foreign contexts.

In FIND you discover a potentially true report from a borderline source and rather than share that source you try to find a high-quality source to read/share, usually by a search of Google or Twitter.

In domestic situations we often have a lot of background knowledge on sources that allows us to scan and select high quality sources from a stream of garbage. People don't always leverage that knowledge, but it's there.

Some of that knowledge transfers to foreign contexts -- knowing what Reuters is or the AFP can help. But we can vastly overestimate what we know about sources in more foreign domains.

So if you want to find better coverage in a situation like this, you need to DO WORK UP FRONT. Familiarize yourself with high quality local sources like the Kyiv Independent, and people with important bridging expertise like @JaneLytv. https://t.co/2BZNg0ntMd

It's really not too much to ask that if you are going to act as a news amplifier that you set aside an hour or so and familiarize yourself with reputable domain-relevant source BEFORE you're staring at a tweet or post or TikTok video deciding to retweet in the moment.

This is also a place where making use of vetted lists, such as this one from @JaneLytv is useful -- you may get a far better feed off a good list than your normal main feed. https://t.co/16FutrL1n1

Final point (I promise!) is just this -- reconsider what your best role is here. Are you best positioned to be a person breaking up to the minute news, or better set up to amplify things a bit older but more vetted?

Is your time best spent chasing down new video of tanks, or in finding and sharing important historical or scholarly context to this invasion of which many may not be aware?

In these breaking news events, the temptation is always to drink the firehose, and the platforms amplify that behavior. But collective sense-making has *many* roles other than "breaking OSINT reporter". Find the role best suited to your capabilities and engage there.

Maybe what you do today is share someone's Twitter list, or a video about how Russia used disinformation in Crimea. Maybe you're doing the boring work of amplifying stories from Reuters, or sharing fact-checks. There's so many ways to engage, pick what works for you.