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In 2007, I moved to London to work as a journalist for Al Jazeera English. At the time, Al Jazeera was a very controversial, even hated, media outlet. Just a few years after the 9/11 attacks, it was seen by the West as the ‘devil’s mouthpiece’, Osama Bin Laden’s propaganda tool.

Before Al Jazeera English, my career was with CNN and Greek media. I had a long and impeccable track record of integrity and transparent, objective news coverage.

When I arrived in London, I looked for a flat. I soon realised that agencies and landlords were rejecting my application on the

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basis that they wouldn’t trust a tenant who works for such a controversial employer. It was the first – and so far, only – time in my life that my professional and personal integrity had been doubted.

Eventually, Al Jazeera English won its position among the world’s most respected and credible media outlets. But as far as I am concerned, I will always remember my unpleasant experience of being judged and categorised as ‘untrustworthy’ by a misguided belief and an aphoristic generalisation.

In this day and age, innovation and new technologies are abolishing barriers and borders, while simultaneously creating challenges and a push for a major mind-shift. Social media platforms, together with the continuous information (and misinformation) flow, intensify the impact of events,

A virus of irrational thinking

We must work together to rebuild trust

By

Elizabeth Filippouli

news and challenges, often creating a falsified impression of the world around us.

This uncertainty generates mistrust, and consequently instability, which affects the relationship among various social stakeholders. According to the 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer, the general population’s trust in four key institutions – business, government, non-governmental organisations, and media – has declined broadly, a phenomenon not reported since Edelman began tracking trust in 2012.

Can we exist without trust? No. In reality, all of us need relationships based on trust and integrity. It would jeopardise our mental and physical survival if we felt that we could not trust people anymore. For that reason, we need to be deeply concerned about the thriving reality of fabricated news and misinformation, and how it affects our ability to filter the truth from falsehood.

Culture, ethics, religion and social inequality are used as excuses for those who choose to participate in this ‘game of lies’ in an effort to claim or secure power. Accurate information is taken wildly out of context, wielded selectively, and supported by ‘fake experts’ or ‘fake facts’ that do not seem fake at all.

Mistrust is like a virus. It spreads easily; it attacks badly. It can ruin relationships, partnerships and good will within seconds. We no longer trust authorities. We no longer trust the media. So how do we restore trust? We need to work together, under a common vision, for a better, more transparent and more inclusive world.

Accountability, ethics, leadership and universal values must be present in the same equation. All of us, together, will have to fight for this. Let’s begin today under this shared vision. ■

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