

# Narrative Tech Case Studies

Presented by



**Narrative  
Initiative**

# First Draft

# FIRST DRAFT

Contact: Aimee Rinehart

Founding: 2015

Location: New York, New York; London, UK;  
and Sydney, Australia

Website: [firstdraftnews.org](http://firstdraftnews.org)

## What They Do

First Draft is a non-profit organization that aims to tackle information disorder. The organization creates and supports both resources and research projects that help verify information and embed best practices in newsrooms and journalism schools around the country. Between elections, the census, and anti-vaccination rumors, First Draft aims to support newsroom reporting on challenging topics that are often riddled with targeted propaganda and unverified sources.

## Stakeholders and Partners

- First Draft works mostly with journalists to create responsible, responsive newsrooms.
- They have nine core founders, and then organize their partners into “Core,” “Academic,” and “Technology” categories.

## Their Tools and Methods

First Draft supports many trainings and best practice toolkits, but, in anticipation of all the information disorder the 2020 U.S. presidential election might bring, First Draft is developing an online platform and separately a certification program called the Digital Investigation Certification of Excellence (DICE) to be launched this year. By successfully completing the program, certification holders may be invited to participate in a private social networking platform with dialogue functionality. Other communication tools (like Slack) are not secure so First Draft whitelabeled Conducttr in order to convene its community of certified verification experts and journalists. The platform allows for closed conversations around information verification such as crowdsourcing witnesses or evaluating geolocation data, as well as responsible editorial decision-making, like choosing to publish extremist manifestos with no-follow links or no links at all. Once a consensus is reached, guided by certified journalists, a piece will be able to be published publicly. The platform will also be a place where topic experts can be tapped for help in understanding things like the anti-vaccination, alt-right and far-left movements and best reporting practices.

## More Info

- Read their curated interviews and publications on their blog [here](#).
- Read about their other projects [here](#).
- Take their courses on information verification [here](#).
- Get a sense of their founders, policies, and resourcing [here](#).

Follow them on Twitter [@firstdraftnews](#)

# Media Cloud



Contact: Cindy Bishop

Founding: 2015

Location: New York, New York; London, UK;  
and Sydney, Australia

Website: [mediacloud.org](http://mediacloud.org)

## What They Do

Media Cloud is an open source platform for media ecosystem analysis. A joint project of Harvard's Berkman Klein Center and Ethan Zuckerman's Center for Civic Media, the platform has three tools: the Explorer, the Topic Manager and the Source Manager. Media Cloud's team of staffers, developers, and researchers guide the product's development, maintain it, action ad hoc research requests, and do their own academic research using the tool.

## Stakeholders and Partners

- Journalists, foundations, non-profits, activists, content creators, businesses and professional, and academics and researchers all use Media Cloud.
- Media Cloud has around 1,600 active users but, as is the case with most open source projects, most users just get their data quietly and leave.
- Funding comes from various foundations including the Ford Foundation and the MacArthur Foundation.

## Their Tools and Methods

Media Cloud has two main engines. In the first, a mix of Perl and Python code collects data from over 59,000 different media sources, processes and stores the data, and then makes it available via Media Cloud's API. In the second, visualizations for Media Cloud's specific tools (the explorer, the topic manager, and the source manager) are built using data from that API. The explorer tool gives a quick overview of how a given topic is being covered, while the topic mapper allows users to dive more deeply into coverage. The source manager is Media Cloud's collection of sources. Because the platform's two core tools are available for engagement via Github, they have also been remixed into a suite of extensions that are also publicly available.

## More Info

- Register for an account and learn to use Media Cloud using the webinars [here](#).
- Read about how Media Cloud has been used in [these case studies](#).

# The Rules



Contact: Mehul Sangham

Founding: 2012

Location: Mexico, Kenya, USA, UK, Costa Rica  
and South Africa

Website: [therules.org](http://therules.org)

## What They Do

The Rules is a global movement designed to bring power back to people and change the rules that create inequality and poverty around the world. They focus specifically on building citizen power in the Global South with the intention of exposing the core logic of our inequitable global systems, connecting the dots between seemingly disparate local struggles, and midwifing the transition to a post-capitalist world by 2023.

## Stakeholders and Partners

- The Rules practices a method called "Culture Hacking" that encompasses both strategic communication and narrative intervention.
- Their custom-built tools facilitate network mapping, big data visualizations, critical discourse analysis, linguistic reframings, and creative translations.
- People engage with The Rules through their written and audio-visual content, their culture hacking platform (which provides a space for activists to share methods, tools, case studies or resources) or, for frontline organisers, their year-long activist ashram.

## A Case in Action

The Rules successfully implemented their "Culture Hacking" method in Mexico City by helping the Ejido people of Atenco articulate opposition to the proposed airport to be built on their land. The Rules partnered with The People's Front and developed a narrative map around the proposed development project. Built with The Rules's proprietary tools, the narrative map came to be composed of media analysis from both traditional news sources and social media. The analysis delivered insights such as identifying other resistance movements that saw water rights as a common struggle. The Rules then delivered those insights to The People's Front, along with co-creating new frames for narrative interventions, such as infographics, logos, the slogan #YoPrefieroEILago, and a high-stakes forum.

## More Info

- Learn more about Culture Hacking [here](#).
- Keep up with The Rules by reading their blog [here](#).

# Guardians.ai

Contact: Zach Verdin  
Founding: 2017  
Location: Distributed  
Website: guardians.ai

## What They Do

Guardians.ai is an organization that aims to protect pro-democracy groups and national interest corporations from information warfare and engineered volatility. They've done projects exposing coordinated efforts to spread misinformation using specific hashtags, and they've analyzed disinformation for Politico surrounding Presidential Candidates Sens. Kamala Harris (D-Calif.), Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), and former Rep. Beto O'Rourke (D-Texas).

## Stakeholders and Partners

- Guardians.ai works for or with the public, governments, national interest corporations, and political campaigns.
- Their team is a network of data scientists, academics, artists, and technologists.
- Zach Verdin and Brett Horvath are co-founders.

## Their Tools and Methods

Guardians.ai uses augmented intelligence workflows to identify and expose patterns of intent, coordination, and influence across social platforms. Their analysis tools are proprietary, but Zach runs a twitter account that maintains a running list of authorities and time-stamps on specific hashtags. @A\_THORITIES was initially developed at CredCon in Austin 2018, and the tool uses algorithms like PageRank and HITS to structure retweets as a graph. By walking the edges of the graph, the tool is able to return and cluster a list of users involved in the promotion of a specific tweet or even a hashtag. The account then creates collections of users so that these lists may be preserved and updated. The tool has been used by multiple journalists to generate timelines of accounts, including Mother Jones who used it to identify suspicious accounts that were promoting #yanggang early.

## More Info

- Read their report on #VoterFraud [here](#).
- Read Politico's coverage of their work on the presidential candidate disinformation [here](#).
- Read BuzzFeed news's coverage of their #VoterFraud work [here](#).
- Read more about @A\_THORITIES [here](#).

# Upwell



Contact: Rachel Weindinger  
Founding: 2012-2015  
Location: San Francisco, CA  
Website: [upwell.us](http://upwell.us)

## What They Do

From 2011-2015, Upwell was an online PR firm charged with changing the story people tell themselves about the ocean. Their mandate and their methods were brand agnostic, so instead of focusing on amplifying one particular organization or group, Upwell looked at the bigger picture and conversational ecosystem around the ocean to study how they could “condition the climate for change.” They monitored online conversations about ocean conservation issues, lead data-driven campaigns, and developed toolkits for influencers on acidification, overfishing and other ocean conservation topics. Their daily newsletter, the Tide Report, was a pioneering curated email list and their blog was one of the first to share and invite feedback in internal conversations and innovative methodologies.

## Stakeholders and Partners

- Upwell was initially a part of Ocean Conservancy, funded by a million-dollar seed grant from the Waitt Foundation.
- Their core team was comprised of Rachel Weindinger, Kieran Mulvaney, Aaron Muszalski, Rachel Dearborn and Matt Fitzgerald. Initial advising came from Vikki Spruill, and was strongly informed by her work at SeaWeb.

## Their Tools and Methods

Upwell’s main tech use is called “big listening.” In “big listening,” Upwell uses monitoring and measurement technologies like Google Alerts, Tweetdeck, and Radian6 (which, with a price tag starting at ~\$60,000K/year, was mostly used by corporate clients at the time -- it would go on to be acquired by Salesforce) to get a sense of the conversation around certain ocean-specific keywords. Upwell bought data going back as far as five years to establish solid baselines for social media mentions, which allowed them to quickly understand and respond to narrative changes around the conversation about the ocean. They were able to successfully mobilize around Shark Week in 2012 with a 109% increase in Shark Week conversation, with the conservation community commanding an impressive 210% increased presence in the conversation.

## More Info

- Read more about the lifecycle of an Upwell campaign [here](#).
- Reach TechPresident’s coverage of Upwell here and watch a PDF 2013 talk on Upwell and Shark Week [here](#).

# ActionSprout



Contact: Adam Mordecai

Founding: 2014

Location: Bellingham, WA; Denver, CO

Website: [actionsprout.com](http://actionsprout.com)

## What They Do

ActionSprout is a social media scheduling, curation, and action tool for Facebook. Built with the needs of nonprofit organizations in mind, ActionSprout helps users curate and schedule quality social media content, grow email lists, run petition campaigns, fundraise online, and manage Facebook ad buys – all in one place.

## Stakeholders and Partners

- ActionSprout is a subscription service but is intended for non-profits and journalists. Nonprofits and news organizations can use it for free.
- It services the managers of pages, mostly for progressive causes, that range from 200 to 2 million followers.
- Progressive organizations can also share stories through ActionSprout's story network by suggesting posts, making their content available for like-minded organizations and causes to distribute.
- MotiveAI, the holding company that owns ActionSprout, is venture-backed and works on progressive political causes.

## Their Tools and Methods

ActionSprout operates like HootSuite and CrowdTangle, focused on Facebook. Users can find, schedule, and cross-amplify content that is both algorithmically and hand-curated by ActionSprout staff. The product integrates with the tools most organizations already use (MailChimp, NationBuilder, Stripe, etc). Additionally, ActionSprout allows non-profits and journalists to quickly find and schedule highly engaging stories, use petitions and donations to grow email lists, and manage Facebook ads more cost-efficiently. ActionSprout's system also provides in-depth timeline analysis to identify an organization's top-performing posts.

## More Info

- Get in touch with them [here](#).