Fake News 101
To Believe or Not to Believe

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Be Boulder.
The problem of ‘fake news’

- Increasing disagreement about facts
- Blurring of the lines between opinion and fact
- Increasing influence of opinion and personal experience over fact
- Declining trust in formerly respected sources of factual information
News trends in U.S. history

• 1880s to 1890s: A surge in populism
  • Economic inequality a problem, especially between industrial giants and agricultural base
  • Increased flow of immigrants, who were blamed for driving wages down
• Period saw a rise in yellow journalism
  • Led by William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer
  • Use of false or misleading stories to attract audiences (and advertisers)
  • News organizations took clear stances and vilified the opposition
  • Greater public confusion and reduced trust of media and government
News trends in U.S. history

• 1920s to 1930s
  • Income inequality reached historical high in 1928
  • Stock market crashed in 1929; unemployment was 24.1 percent
  • Rise of economic protectionism

• Tabloid journalism era
  • Used sensationalized language and intermingled fact and fiction
  • Focused less on news, though, and more on sex, violence, and alcohol
  • Established news organizations competed by offering more non-news content
News trends in U.S. history

• 1960s to 1970s
  • Period marked by protests against the Vietnam War, racial discrimination, social ills
  • Surge of populism under the leadership of George Wallace,
    • Got 13.6 percent of the vote in the 1968 election
  • Decline of trust in government
  • Disagreement over facts, social policy, political rights

• Development of “New Journalism,” which relied on subjective experience
• Rise of investigative journalism
News trust today

*Americans' Trust in the Mass Media*

In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in the mass media -- such as newspapers, TV and radio -- when it comes to reporting the news fully, accurately and fairly -- a great deal, a fair amount, not very much or none at all?

\[ % \text{ Great deal/Fair amount} \]

1997: 53
1999: 53
2001: 54
2003: 54
2005: 50
2007: 47
2009: 45
2011: 44
2013: 44
2015: 32

Gallup
News trust today

• A Knight-Gallup survey of 19,000 adults showed:
  • 84 percent say the media has an important role in democracy
  • 58 percent say the increased number of news sources makes it harder to be informed
  • 73 percent say the spread of misinformation on the Internet is a problem
    • Only one-third are confident they can distinguish factual news from commentary or opinion
News trust today

• A Knight-Gallup survey of 19,000 adults showed:
  • Only 44 percent could identify an objective news source
• On May 15, 2017, *The Washington Post* reported that Trump shared classified information during a meeting with Russian diplomats
  • Headlines from cable news on that story:
    • CNN:  *Wash Post: Trump shared highly classified info with Russians*
    • MSNBC:  *Dem congressman calls for impeaching Trump*
    • Fox News:  *Liberals melting down & turning violent*
News values

• Journalism is “the activity of gathering, assessing, creating and presenting news and information.” (American Press Institute)

• Journalism “is not defined by technology, nor by journalists or the techniques they employ. … The principles and purpose of journalism are defined by something more basic: the function news plays in the lives of people.” (Bill Kovach & Tom Rosenstiel)
  • They argue that the primary function is to give citizens the information needed to be free and self governing
News values

- Proximity
- Prominence
- Timeliness
- Relevance
- Impact
- Conflict
- Novelty
- Usefulness

News values diagram
News values

- First obligation is to the truth
- First loyalty is to citizens
- Requires a discipline of verification
- Be independent from those they cover
- Be an independent monitor of power

- Provide a forum for public criticism and compromise
- Make the significant interesting and relevant
- Keep news comprehensive and proportional
- Citizens, too, have rights and responsibilities when it comes to the news
Obama on the role of the media
Citizens’ rights and responsibilities

- People who air their thoughts and opinions – or “like” a story or retweet it – need to realize that they are affecting, educating and possibly misguiding others.
- Citizens who write must gain a sense of responsibility in the process.
- Citizens must also “read across the aisle” to be fully informed.
  - Despite cognitive dissonance
  - Recognizing our own biases
Polarization and the press

Trust in Mass Media, by Party
% Great deal/Fair amount of trust
- Republicans
- Independents
- Democrats

GALLUP
# Polarization and the Press

## Problems Associated With News Coverage Today, by Party Identification

Would you say each of the following is a major problem, a minor problem or not a problem with news coverage today? Figures are the percentages who say the matter is "a major problem".

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>ALL</th>
<th>DEMOCRATS</th>
<th>INDEPENDENTS</th>
<th>REPUBLICANS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The spread of inaccurate information on the internet</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owners of news outlets attempting to influence the ways stories are reported</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News organizations being too dramatic or too sensational in order to attract more readers or viewers</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much bias in the reporting of news stories that are supposed to be objective</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much bias in the selection of what stories news organizations cover or don't cover</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing number of news sources reporting a specific ideological viewpoint rather than being neutral</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough investigative journalism to uncover important facts</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News organizations reporting information they think is accurate but turns out to be inaccurate</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Polarization and the press

• Back to the 44 percent who can name an objective news source
  • 24 percent said Fox News
    • 60 percent of Republicans; 3 percent of Democrats
  • 13 percent said CNN
    • 4 percent of Republicans and 21 percent of Democrats
  • 10 percent said NPR
    • 1 percent of Republicans and 15 percent of Democrats
Polarization and the press

• 40 percent of Republicans consider accurate news stories that cast a politician or political group in a negative light to always be “fake news”
Bias and the press

• Internet has reduced the cost of publishing news
  • But producing news – reporting it, verifying it, writing it – is still costly
• Internet ushered in partisan news sites such as Daily Kos, InfoWars and Breitbart that do little or no original reporting
  • Drudge Report had been relatively unknown until January 1998 when it ran a story on the Clinton-Lewinsky affair
• Also a result of the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine in 1987
  • Eliminated a requirement that broadcasters provide balance on controversial issues
Bias and the press

Ideological Placement of Each Source’s Audience

Average ideological placement on a 10-point scale of ideological consistency of those who got news from each source in the past week...

- Audience is more consistently liberal
- Audience is more consistently conservative

Fake news

- A majority consider “fake news” a very serious threat to our democracy
- Americans are most likely to believe that people knowingly portraying false information as if it were true always constitutes “fake news.”
- But …
Social media and fake news

• Social media gave us the personalized news feed
  • Driven by your friends and interests, not by a need to have access to accurate information
• “Social media fueled 'fake news' because content designed to be shared by friends is not necessarily content designed to deliver accurate information. After all, how many times have you shared something you've never bothered to read?”
  • Evan Speigel, CEO of Snapchat
Social media and fake news

• During the 2016 election, Facebook sold more than $100,000 of ads to a company linked to the Kremlin
• Google sold more than $4,500 of ads to accounts connected to the Russian government
• More impactful because our guards are down
  • Drawn to unusual, hard-to-believe stories
  • Posted or retweeted by our “friends”
  • See social media as “benevolent curator” of information
Social media and fake news

• Information spreads faster than it can be fact-checked
  • Mainstream outlets chase the rumors
• Paul Horner made $10,000 a month from ads on his website that published fake news stories
  • One was retweeted by Trump campaign manager Corey Lewandowski
Social media and fake news
Fighting fake news

• Think and verify information before you share it
• Expand your news diet to include diverse perspectives from quality news sources
  • And yes, you may need to pay for news
• If you have to repeat a lie, it’s best to limit the description of it
Fighting fake news

• Use IMVAIN to deconstruct your news
  • Independent sources are preferable to self-interested sources
  • Multiple sources are preferable to a report based on a single source
  • Sources who Verify or provide verifiable information are preferable to those who merely assert
  • Authoritative and/or Informed sources are preferable to sources who are uninformed or lack authoritative background
  • Named sources are better than anonymous ones