Information disorder
Helping students to think critically about the news

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TRY Conference 2019
Our workshop as advertised

Misinformation, disinformation, bias, propaganda, “fake news,” bots, algorithms, “truthiness,” “alternative facts,” information pollution, memes, clickbait, echo chambers, filter bubbles, information overload…

In this session, we discuss our “Information disorder” workshop, which aims to help students more skillfully navigate the news in today’s messy and confusing information environment. “In this post-truth age librarians are more important than ever,” claims an American Library Association report on fake news (Cooke, 2018). Traditional checklist methods of evaluation (e.g. CRAAP; RADAR) fall short however. Instead our interactive workshop asks participants to reflect on their own news practices. We look at the various types of news content and some of the problems that can creep in. And we introduce a critical thinking skills framework from journalism through which to evaluate the news around us.
A mission?

At the ALA Annual Conference 2017 closing keynote:

“It was [Hillary] Clinton’s assessment of librarianship’s most urgent battle that garnered deafening cheers and an ovation. She said that librarians ‘have to be on the front lines of one of them most important fights we have ever faced in history in this country: the fight to defend truth and reason, evidence and facts.’”

How & where do you get your news?
What is your lens?
Biases in how we all think

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision Bias</th>
<th>Distortion</th>
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| **Anchoring**          | • We tend to be influenced by numbers, even invalid ones, and we don’t adjust away from them as we should  
• Numbers affect our decisions, even when we should ignore them  
• Our questions prime our attention for certain information, ignoring or omitting contradictory data |
| **Framing**            | • How a situation is presented to you affects your decision. Generally our pain of losing is more powerful than our pleasure of winning, hence we really are risk averse to gains and risk seeking to avoid further loss. |
| **Availability heuristic** | • Vivid, easily imagined, but uncommon events are highly weighted in our brains  
• Recent events get weighted disproportionately higher than past events |
| **Confirmation bias**  | • Our initial decisions become self-fulfilling prophecies  
We seek out evidence that confirms our initial decisions, ignoring information against them |
| **Commitment escalation** | • Making decisions and committing resources doesn’t necessarily guarantee a reward, and may produce a loss  
• It’s difficult to accept sunk costs |
| **Hindsight bias**     | • Once we know something, we can’t remember when we did not know it  
• This challenges our ability to learn from past failures |

https://hbr.org/2012/09/how-to-minimize-your-biases-when

See also: https://www.globalcognition.org/confirmation-bias-3-cures/
What is “fake news”? 

Puck Magazine, 1894. 

## Beyond ‘Fake News’

### 10 Types of Misleading News

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Propaganda</td>
<td>Adopted by governments, corporations and non-profits to manage attitudes, values and knowledge</td>
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<td>€ money</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Appeals to emotions</td>
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<td>politics/power</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Can be beneficial or harmful</td>
<td></td>
<td>humour/fun</td>
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<td></td>
<td>In the United States and other countries, propaganda is often employed in an attempt to influence public opinion</td>
<td></td>
<td>(mis)inform</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clickbait</td>
<td>Eye-catching, sensational headlines designed to distract</td>
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<td>€ passion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Often misleading and content may not reflect headline</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drives ad revenue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sponsored Content</td>
<td>Advertising made to look like editorial work, potentially misleading content to increase ad revenue</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Consumers might not identify content as advertising if it is not clearly labeled</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satire and Hoax</td>
<td>Social commentary or humour</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Varies widely in quality and intended meaning may not be apparent</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Can embarrass people who confuse the content as true</td>
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<tr>
<td>Misinformation</td>
<td>Includes a mix of factual, false or partially false content</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Intention can be to inform but author may not be aware the content is false</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>False attributions, doctored content and misleading headlines</td>
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<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>Established news organisations sometimes make mistakes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mistakes can hurt the brand, offend or result in litigation</td>
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<td>Reputable organisations publish apologies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bogus</td>
<td>Entirely fabricated content spread intentionally to disinform, engage in guerrilla marketing tactics, bots, comments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Counterfeit branding</td>
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How to think critically about the news

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What is Journalism?

- The discipline of verification distinguishes professional journalism from other news making.
- “…journalism has become a collaborative exercise, an ongoing participatory conversation among those who produce news and those who consume it.”


- Journalism “aspries to professional standards of truth-telling, methodologies of verification, and ethics of public interest”


https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/journalism_fake_news_disinformation_print_friendly_0.pdf
The Journalism of Verification

“The basic telltale signs are these: Look for the effort of verification. The hallmarks of vetted news involve a multiplicity of sources and a skepticism of what those sources say, and evidence the journalists has not accepted things at face value but has gone through the process of digging down into what has happened.”

The Journalism of Assertion

“In the journalism of assertion, the reporters and hosts and anchors rarely provide answers. They arrange discussion. They pose questions. But fundamentally the mind-set here has shifted to partisan sources arguing over possible answers. The talking points on both sides are offered – though often only those from the polarized edges of the debate. But less often are these talking points examined for accuracy.”

Principles of Journalism - Kovach and Rosenstiel

- Journalism’s first obligation is to the truth.
- Its first loyalty is to citizens.
- Its essence is a discipline of verification.
- Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover.
- It must serve as a monitor of power.
- It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise.
- It must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant.
- It must present the news in a way that is comprehensive and proportional.
- Its practitioners have an obligation to exercise their personal conscience.
- Citizens have rights and responsibilities when it comes to the news as well – even more so as they become producers and editors themselves.

The Way of Skeptical Knowing

1. Type: What kind of content is this?
2. Source: Who and what are the sources cited and why should I believe them?
3. Evidence: What is the evidence and how was it vetted?
4. Interpretation: Is the main point of the piece proven by the evidence?
5. Completeness: What is missing? What might be an alternative explanation or understanding?
6. Knowledge: Am I learning every day what I need?

https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/six-critical-questions-can-use-evaluate-media-content/
A news story gone viral

Native American elder Nathan Phillips, teen Nick Sandmann give versions of encounter.
1) Type: What kind of content is this?

- Is it news, opinion, advertising, a reaction to someone else’s content?
- Who produced it?
- How was it funded?
- Is there a political slant?
2) Source: Who and what are the sources cited and why should I believe them?

- Who is quoted? What level of knowledge do they have about the topic? How close are they to a first-hand witness? How do they know?
- Do they have a bias?
- What documents, reports or data are cited? Who produced them and what do you know about that organization?
  - Sourceless news
  - Journalist as witness
  - Credentialed experts
  - Proximity of knowledge
  - Distance in time
  - Anonymous sources
3) Evidence: What is the evidence and how was it vetted?

- Evidence - the proof that sources offer for what they know
- Is the evidence a document? An eyewitness account? Hearsay or second-hand? Speculation?
- What did the author do to verify this evidence?
- Look for signs of a method of verification - how did the author or reporter check the evidence?
4) Interpretation: Is the main point of the piece proven by the evidence?

- Does the main point of the story make sense?
- What conclusions are being drawn and are they supported by the evidence offered?
- Could the evidence support a different conclusion than the one being presented?
- Things to look for:
  - The more evidence, the better.
  - Are alternative views given the chance to make their best argument?
  - Whatever is unknown, unanswered or unclear should be acknowledged.
  - The best news providers inform the consumer when new information contradicts or rounds out the original story.
5) Completeness: What is missing? What might be an alternative explanation or understanding?

- Ask yourself what you don’t understand about a subject. Did you miss something or was it not there?
- Did the story explain why certain questions couldn’t yet be answered?
- Does the story help you understand the issue and what you can do about it?
6) Knowledge: Am I learning every day what I need?

- Are you spending your media time well?
- What media did you consume today, yesterday?
- Could you explain the situations you read/heard about to someone?
- What are some things you have heard about that you want to understand better? Where could you go to learn?
How did your lens affect your assessment of the story?
Images

Torn print: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/925806

Newsboy:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Michael_Mc_Nelis,_8_years_old,_a_newsboy._This_boy_has_justRecovered_from_his_second_attack_of_pneumonia._Was_found..._-_NARA_-_523323.jpg

Lens:

Beyond “fake new” infographic: