

docsTruthiness

#Truthicon



Link to this document: <http://bit.ly/truthicon>

IDEA SPREADSHEET: <http://bit.ly/truthicon-ideamatrix>

Search for “CURRENT” to find the place of current livenotes.

These are live notes from the Berkman/MIT Truthiness conference:

<http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/truthiness/about/>

Scroll down to take part in the realtime notes!

You can help by adding, reworking, inserting links that are referenced by speakers, and so on. Thanks!

Links to previous sessions are at the bottom of this doc.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIVENOTES FROM PREVIOUS SESSIONS

- **Early Morning Session:** <http://etherpad.mit.edu/truthicon-earlymorning>
- **Biases Abound: We Can't Handle (or Don't Want) the Truth**
<http://etherpad.mit.edu/truthicon-biases>
- **Inflection Point** (Nesson) <http://etherpad.mit.edu/truthicon-inflectionpoint>
- **Interventions for Individuals: Tools and Personal Empowerment** (Sandvig, Hargittai, Metaxas, Paul Resnick, Lotan): <http://etherpad.mit.edu/truthicon-tools-empowerment>
- **Interventions for Institutions: Filters, Intermediaries, and Policies** (Teachout, Sifry, Silverman, Miller, Benton, Robinson): <http://etherpad.mit.edu/truthicon-institutions>
- **Onward!** (Zuckerman, Maclay) <http://etherpad.mit.edu/truthicon-onward>

LIVENOTES IN THIS DOCUMENT

[Emily Bell, formerly of the Guardian.](#)

[Kai Wright](#)

[Kathleen Hall Jamieson](#)

[Chris Mooney](#)

[Brendan Nyhan](#)

Reflection and Synthesis Session

Urs Gasser

Ethan Zuckerman

Interventions for Individuals: Tools and Personal Empowerment

Eszter Hargittai

Panagiotis "Takis" Metaxas

Paul Resnick

Gilad Lotan

Interventions for institutions: Filters, Intermediaries, and Policies

Craig Silverman

Joshua Benton

Rashad Robinson (@rashadrobison): Executive director of color of change

Zephyr

Last Round of Questions

Emily Bell, formerly of the Guardian.

She opens with the Three Little Pigs Open Journalism video: <http://gu.com/p/35zdg>

The technology department of the Guardian created this in 1999 by creating an unmoderated "Talk" thread on the newspaper. When it started, it was predominated by people who asked, "What is your favourite stick insect?" In 1999, every media organisation spent all their effort on the opposite-making sure that everything that appeared in the public domain had to be checked, lawyered, and then released. Participatory media is difficult for journalism, since their investment has gone around barriers to preserve facts and truth.

If you go to any newsroom now, the big existential crisis is that they can only afford 3 people, not 7 to look through the copy. They can't go through the filters they went through before. BBC: don't break news on twitter. The notion of control is so baked into journalism that the story in the video is still very controlled. What you don't have is an investment in the kinds of things which allow journalism to participate in the crowd.

Emily thinks that inviting in the crowd will sustain the future of journalism, allowing people to comment and participate. We have to accept the possibility of wrong, as journalists. And even accept it. In newsrooms, we should talk about the shift from a psychologically defensive world to the world of #opennews. Few news orgs have a process or guidelines about how to link out from stories. Few newsrooms have invested in data - a framework for collecting, analyzing, understanding large datasets. Usually that's just the largest orgs, and just a few people.

How many people have heard "the problem with comments is that they're all terrible?" It's often true, but it's also about process. Journalism is a process, and there's no training around engagement. Some organizations - the guardian, the times, the BBC - are investing in this. We want to value those transactions properly. We don't have a currency that says 'this elevates our journalism, and makes it more truthful.' Most are cautious about the crowd.

She wanted to frame the problem: for journalists, it's not easy to negotiate.

Kai Wright

<http://colorlines.com>

Kai comes at this with a set of questions for us all. Before we get to the action question, there's the broader frame. When we're talking about truth, truthiness, and media, we have to ask "whose truth matters, and what are the boundaries?" He starts with an anecdote: 2006, Kai was at a friend's wedding. They were talking about money. Kai says 'It's tough out there, right?' His friend replies: "Stocks are up, it's fabulous!" But Kai had been reporting in Black communities about homes, credit, jobs. And the Black community was still in a recession, since 2001. Both had facts, and both were accurate: but what was the truth? Media has done a poor job, because of focus on a narrow set of facts in the midst of a crisis.

Kai says we're discussing a crisis of misinformation. But how do we broaden the world of facts? To take another example: robo-citing. The attorney generals just settled with the 5 largest banks re: foreclosure documents automatically sent. NYTimes has covered it, Kai was covering it, but reporters weren't supposed to cover this. Journalists were supposed to talk about whether people were irresponsible borrowers. So everyone gathered facts. But no one was supposed to focus on the predatory approach of the lenders. At colorlines, they are trying to bring more people's facts into the conversation so that the frame of the conversation can be broadened.

Dan Schultz: When you say 'more people's facts,' what does that mean? Is truth really relative?

Kai: my assertion is not that facts are relative. I believe that things are knowable, they can be known, we have a critical problem of people trying to muddy up things that are knowable. But there's a broader job we need to be playing, around a broader set of facts that we never bring into play in the conversation. If what I'd seen in 2006 had been discussed more broadly, we might have avoided the crisis.

People who know what was happening in Black communities weren't seen as legitimate. So it's also about legitimacy to speak.

Susan: From Kai's blog: many Black communities were in crisis before the national crisis began.

Kathleen Hall Jamieson

She begins by saying 'I'm here to ensure "fidelity to the knowable"'

Then presents about <http://FlackCheck.org>, and asking people to call editors and television station owners to change things.

Television ad propaganda is not open to journalistic rebuttal. How do we counter visual with visual. Flackcheck is trying to move into the visual/aural domain to reframe the metacommunication using humour to knock down everything that ad may have left. It also has a second premise: you can learn to detect patterns of deception. That will be more helpful than

learning all those facts.

Flackcheck is trying to inform people about when they need to be mistrustful of something.

Using the example of Lincoln/McClellan, as a way to teach people about the methods that are standard in political disinformation campaigns: (<http://www.flackcheck.org/lincoln-campaign/>)

KHJ wants to tie sleazy messages back to candidates, in order to tar the candidate with the duplicitous moves. Easier to do with patterns of deception than with individual instances. The “Way out of Wack Attack” section highlights extreme examples. It’s also important for people to understand that both sides do this.

The goal is to establish normative underpinnings of democratic discourse.

Joe Torres from Free Press: we’ve been going to the FCC to demand that broadcasters put their records online. The broadcasters are saying it’s too cumbersome to put the records online. This would be an easy way to enable the public to hold them accountable.

Issue of social construction of the Truth. We have to move away from facts or systems to consider human centered perspective, focus not just on information but also on people.

Question: Jonathan (?) from Ford Foundation, used to be from CBS (?). As we started to put our shows online, within 60 minutes, the commentary had morphed into objectionable stuff: racism, homophobia, extremely charged comments. They would monitor and moderate, and they ultimately went towards asking people to register. So how do people actually receive online comments? People gear up for combat, prepared to step into the fray. But Tim Hwang talked about the cognitive pull of social networks, where someone can penetrate what appears to be a circle of trust. What are the rules of the road for intimate online interaction?

Emily Bell: discussion of moderation approaches. Do you hire people, do you have the community self-moderate? This has to be a long process change for organisations.

Sasha Costanza Chock: What’s awesome about the 3 pigs Guardian video is that it doesn’t end with the conviction of the pigs. It continues and zooms out to the broader framing of the mortgage crisis. How do we address systemic crisis, as Kai and colorlines.com asks us? How do we go beyond to individual fact-checking to build in learning processes which can move publics to participate in reframing the conversation, as Yochai invoked in SOPA/PIPA? How do we connect networked publics to the process of frame shifting?

Chris Mooney

Biases Abound: We Can’t Handle (or Don’t Want) the Truth

Chris Mooney, author of “The Republican Brain”

The science of why we deny “science and reality”? Why do we double down on false beliefs? Chris has been writing about scientific misinformation for ten years. His first book, “The Republican War on Science” was wrong. He was wedded to the idea of rationality from Thomas Paine that if you put in good information and use rational arguments, people will come to accept what’s true, especially if you educate them and teach them critical thinking skills.

But there’s a science about why we deny science. There is a science of truthiness. The “Smart Idiots” effect. The Pew poll on global warming showed that people with more education are more likely to deny global warming.

<http://www.people-press.org/2008/05/08/a-deeper-partisan-divide-over-global-warming/>

The more capable you are of coming up with arguments that support your beliefs, the less likely you are to change. We know that it’s hard to get people to change their minds. There are so many famous characters who fall for rationalisation and false delusions. Pip in Great Expectations wants to believe that people have his best interests at heart, and he destroys his life in the process.

Theory of “motivated reasoning” and confirmation biases. Emotion guides the process of retrieving memories. We think we’re reasoning logically, when we’re acting like lawyers rather than scientists. By the time we have a conscious argument, we’re already rationalising, making our case.

This explains “goalpost shifting.” Last year, the birthers got the birth certificate. But they didn’t change their beliefs. The same goes for all manner of logical errors. The error used to be that we should learn critical thinking. Reasoning helps us see these problems in others more easily than we see them in ourselves.

Parental Advisory: Tipper Gore v Frank Zappa, “PMRC’s demands are the equivalent of treating dandruff by decapitation.” Chris Mooney on Klaczynski:

[\(http://blogs.discovermagazine.com/intersection/2011/05/30/education-biased-reasoning-and-enlightenment/\)](http://blogs.discovermagazine.com/intersection/2011/05/30/education-biased-reasoning-and-enlightenment/)

Adolescent country fans can see logical fallacies when it’s an anti-country argument. But they can’t see them when it’s anti-heavy metal. And this doesn’t get better over time: it gets to the heart of why some people deny science. People just think their science is better. Our moral values push us: hierarchical or egalitarian, individualist or communitarian.

Only 23% of Republicans agree that a scientist is trustworthy on topics of global warming (Pew study).

[Question: so what does science say about these two axes? eg which underlying goal has more

‘support.’]

Mooney says watchers of Fox News believe more wrong things than others. Mooney refers to “right wing authoritarians” studies. Mooney says don’t argue using facts. Instead, like Yoda, we need to unlearn what we have learned.

Brendan Nyhan

Dartmouth College

<http://www.spinsanity.org/>

<http://www.spinsanity.org/book/>

Countering misinformation:

http://www.cjr.org/swing_states_project/countering_misinformation_tip.php?page=all

In a past life, Brendan was a fact-checker. Fact-checkers antagonise half of their audience every day. It’s the people who have strong views and are likely to defend views are the most likely to use sites.

Question: can the media correct misperceptions? The obvious place to start is for the media to be more aggressive to fact-check claims. Consider, for example, “Death Panel” rumour. Brendan ran a controlled experiment with undergraduates They also used the “Bush banned stem cell research”

Conservatives were happy to hear that Bush banned stem cell research, but liberals didn’t move. It gets worse. In some cases, corrections don’t fail to change people’s minds, they make them worse. After being exposed to a fact check, people double back.

There are also lots of people who mean well. People are shown true and false statements. After 30 minutes, people start to misremember the false statements as true. Familiar claims start to seem true over time. People remember the claim, but they forget whether it was true or not.

Final note: while we can talk about fantastic tools to correct misinformation, the people who seek those tools out might be the people we’re least interested in reaching because they check facts. And even in those cases, counter-information is just a click away. If you search for “obama birth certificate” you will get lots of different options which provide supporting information for whatever you believe. It’s easier to buttress pre-existing views than ever before.

Problem: debunks get buried in the article. Put it in the headline

Suggestion: negations. Don’t negate, because you can reinforce that claim.

Suggestion: avoid the fringe. Artificial balance leads to quotation of fringe sources who can be misleading.

Suggestion: people are really good at arguing against textual information, but graphics seem to

be more effective for mis-perceptions that can be graphed. You can't graph Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, but you can show temperature information
Suggestion: find sources that people are likely to believe

Next up: Susan introduces Charlie Nesson.

[@natematias is a livenotes GOD]

Reflection and Synthesis Session

(summarising items from earlier today)

Urs Gasser

"An Information Quality Perspective"

1. **Foundational Issues:** Why are we having this conversation now? Perhaps we feel we need to adjust our navigation systems now that we have new technology. A second explanation is that we finally understand the power of information.

What is information? Gasser encourages us to think about the raw data, the message, and the pragmatic effects. We talk about the granularity of information, the way it flows, about search and reuse of information (quotations, etc). And then we think about the quality of information, and how information of different kinds of quality interplay with each other. We also talked about context.

What are the factors that influence the quality of information?

- Actors who shape the information ecosystem (Facebook, Google)
- Economic factors, including incentives for misinformation
- Technological factors (distribution, aggregation, etc)
- Psychological factors and information norms (role of emotion, behavioural science, social norms)
- Legal environment (Copyright) (US Data Quality Act
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Data_Quality_Act)

2. Methods

- Understanding the phenomenon: tracking information flow over time
- Mapping and analyzing relationships (online and offline)
- Tools and methods of manipulation

- Methods of intervention

Important use cases:

- news, political information
- science and policy making
- trade and commerce
- personal well-being, incl health information

Intervention points:

- Tech: filters, aggregation, visualization, navigation tools
- Human: Fact-checking, cooperation, peer review, education/training
- Economic, e.g. markets for truth (reputation, brokers/NGOs, insurance)
- Legal: truth in advertisement, privacy laws, quality minima

Challenges:

- we understand the pieces: the network analysis, the information processing, the psychology, but how do we bring these things together?
- now we need to ask, how can we make a difference (strategic, pragmatic)
- to do that, we need spaces of experimentation and learning, where activists and researchers can meet and think together

Ethan Zuckerman

Since moving over to MIT after 8 years at the Berkman Center. Does everyone at Harvard wear a suit 24/7? What are the cultural differences? When we take on these issues, the Berkman Center asks, can we find the system way to think about this? Urs has put together a great system. What's great about them is that they inform the way we design tools. We can try to get a thorough view of an issue and intervene. The MIT approach is to say that the system will come to us eventually, and we should try a small experiment, something which we can try in the context of a MA thesis, and if it gets us somewhere, then we'll keep going.

The trick is to find tractable problems. So I'm trying to pick up the questions from this morning from the perspective of tractability.

(relating ideas from the New America Foundation fact-checking gathering) Misinformation is like getting shot. Fact-checking is like a bandage-- trying to staunch the bleeding. Maybe we can develop bullet-proof-vests for truth. Maybe it sits in your web browser or your TV, and when the bad information comes in, it tries to block it, you get bruised, but you're not killed.

Can we dissuade people from shooting. Can we get people to stop saying mistruths. This is intractable. Somehow shaming doesn't have the power we once thought it did. We can't shame people into stopping.

I'm surprised how US-centric and how left-right this conversation has been. Reference to Ivan Segal-- it's very different in cases where you have facts already. People working in the citizen media space, we're still trying to figure out the meaning of the [Amina Arraf](#) story-- a lesbian living and blogging in Damascus, newspapers interviewed her-- except that the blog was an American living in Scotland (McMaster) who had spent years preparing an identity. "It's fake lesbians all the way down." We were so desperate for information out of Syria that we were unusually receptive to this voice. Some governments have decided that killing journalists is effective-- and we can't do much about that.

Ethan: the bad news is how many of these problems fall into the intractable. I am not confident that we are going to strike at the root by 2012.

Example: FlakCheck. Can we try to see if citizens have an effect on how many ads air or don't air. We should know by the end of the year.

This afternoon, let's try to talk about questions that we can test out experimentally. Tomorrow's hack day (not really a hack day) will involve a lot of people coming from many perspectives who can come together, think through these design challenges, decide what we want to test, figure out how to set up those experiments, and imagining tools to take us there.

1. Phil Menzer is asking: are there things that can help us know if something is a bot or is it human?
2. Susan Crawford: it's an open question about whether there are certain factual questions we can open up to crowdsourcing

Ethan: if you have questions you want to ask, that we can answer, please ask

Idea: Brendan: **micro-shaming**: we under-emphasize the role of elites. It's easier to stop these things from starting. If you anticipate the shaming, you might be less likely to produce misinformation. But what kinds of small-scale. Can we figure out how to shame people without getting it onto the

Idea: At Flakcheck, we're giving stinkweeds and orchids

Melanie Sloan: Shaming has lost its power. Everyone gets a second act, no matter what terrible thing they have done. Will people involved in PR change? [extended discussion about shame, and if it works]

Idea: I worry less about falsehood than facts which are out of context.

Martha Minow: thanks for being here! Reference to the movie "Silkwood" where Cher says, "give me the size of a problem I can solve." Also, "Comfort, that's when the storm is the right size."

(Martha introduced a mandatory problem solving course for all lawyers)

Becky Hogge: could we use advertising, and pressure people via advertisers? (Change.org)

Ari Rabin-Havt: if there's a bubble of untruth, misinformation gets very dangerous when it gets out of the bubble. How do we discover where things seep out and find out how that happens. (JNML:Great idea)

Kai Wright: how do we do a context check? (Joe Arpaio, trying to create doubt to protect himself). How can we check the context?

Judith: comments about shaming made me think about studies around lie detecting. Lie detectors don't test your lie, it tests your feeling about your lie-- sociopaths pass. We should create a classification of the people who promulgate lies. There are the political sociopaths, people who are thinking about money, people who are misled.

Ideas: Churnalism website from the Media Standards Trust
(politifact is using their code)

Dan Schultz: Priming with self-affirmation has been shown to help with motivated reasoning-- are there other forms of priming?

How much do people value honesty to begin with? Can we turn shaming on its head?

Truth goggles, a credibility layer for Internet content. I've found semi-tractable problems

- (what does the interface look like?)
- (where do these facts come from, and how do you scale collecting facts)
- (how do you find instances of facts)

(Fact checking techs, from Twitter:

<http://wiki.mediapolicy.opentechinstitute.org/index.php/Factchecking/platforms>)

Interventions for Individuals: Tools and Personal Empowerment

Christian Sandvig, Uni of Illinois at urbana-Champaign
Eszter Hargitta, Northwestern University

Lots of tools, here we go!

Christian: here are some ways to think about interventions for individuals.

Mark Stefik: there are four ways to think about the Internet, archetypal metaphors. The

metaphor underlying our thoughts about it will condition what designs and regulations we choose.

1. A library
2. The mail (interpersonal communications)
3. A virtual world
4. A marketplace

[Q: no public sphere or network?]

Approaches: libraries help or blame the patron for failures to access information. We need to move away from the library, but Facebook and other companies are thinking of it as a marketplace.

We could write tools to point out to the user that they're interacting in a marketplace, when they think they're in a library.

[Robert Merton](#), coiner of "Role Model" and "Self Fulfilling Prophecy" wrote in 1945 about the media celebrity power of "[Kate Smith](#)," and she might get people to believe things are true. His idea was "pseudo-gemeinschaft," and he said that technology is creating a false community of values where people will believe that they're in a community of values with celebrities and will believe what those celebrities tell them. Merton talked about "a climate of reciprocal distrust" where you think too much about facts. "Society becomes an arena of rival frauds." All facts get devalued. We might "fetishize sincerity."

Challenge: how do we move society beyond an arena of rival frauds

Eszter Hargittai

Eszter presents some findings from a multiyear study of youth and digital media use, supported by Macarthur. Findings from over 500 youth included questions about their ability to navigate and identify credible information sources.

In one example, they showed multiple links that claimed to be banks: phishing URLs. only 12% of a study of 500+ young adults couldn't tell which was the right Citibank website).

In the second example, a google search for "morning after pill" returns <http://morningafterpill.org>. This website bills itself as "the truth about the morning after pill," which is against the morning after pill and will not tell you how to obtain it. She notes that [.org](#) and [.com](#) have no difference in the kind of content which might be hosted on those sites. However, most people believe [.org](#) seems to have much more credibility.

A third example would be to search on Google for “Martin Luther King,” which points to martinlutherking.org as a top result. This site presents itself as “A True Historical Examination.” This site is by the “White Pride World Wide” organisation. A lot of students actually will talk about it as a source they would use for a homework assignment.

Educators often conduct training sessions to help people learn how to use websites. But do we measure the effectiveness of these sessions? Of the people who went through the training, almost nobody would have relied on martinlutherking.org, and people without the training would not have relied on the site.

Ezster thinks that the people are missing from the conversation. Social science is good at incorporating people, looking at how people use tools on the ground. We shouldn't forget the average users: what they know, what they do. We can create tools, but also have to make sure that users know about them and how to use them.

Panagiotis “Takis” Metaxas

“tweeter bombs” “[American Future Fund](http://AmericanFutureFund.org),” an Iowa Republican group linked to 1988 [Willie Horton ad](http://WillieHorton.com), 2004 Kerry Swiftboat ads, and 2010 Martha Coakley attacks. Also, a pre-fabricated tweet factory: “Patriot Action Network” to tweet bomb journalists a message to get the message out.

Social Theorems - We treat our acquired knowledge as theorems, the same way we do with mathematical theorems, but our social theorems are not the same as testable theories. For example, consider “there's no such thing as a free lunch” vs $F = m \cdot a$ (Newton's second law: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newton%27s_laws_of_motion).

We confuse natural laws with social behavior. We'd love to society the same way as nature, but it doesn't. Nature doesn't care if you've done a prior experiment, and won't change in the second experiment, but society will, when you try to repeat an experiment and get different results.

We still know nothing about society.

Metaxas is developing a tool which will help you decide if you should trust a piece of information, based on these theories:

Social Theorem 1: unedited retweets indicate agreement and reveal communities of likely minded people, especially in political discussion.

Social Theorem 2: Given enough time and people's attention, lies have short, questioned lives

Social theorem 3: People with open minds and critical thinking abilities are better at figuring out truth than those without.

[Retweets](#) about political issues indicate agreement, and reveal communities of like minded people. Metaxas shows a twitter link visualization to illustrate this.

Another finding is that, given enough time, lies have short, questioned lives. He shows a table of case studies of confirmed truths vs. false rumors. In the London riots rumors case, they found that false information did not live long. "Time saves truth from falsehood and envy."

Finally, in terms of critical thinking, it's true that you can't fool all people all the time. You do want technology that gives you information, but education is key: you'll still need to figure things out using your own brain, at the end of the day.

Paul Resnick

from U Mich School of Information

Paul is going to talk about two tools: 1 for individuals, and another by individuals. He's showing early demos of each.

Sidharth Chhabra (sidc@umich.edu) is a student working on this. Based on [NewsCube](#), an aggregator that clusters stories into different perspectives on an event or topic. Your progress exploring these clusters helps you understand various angles. They've made an extension for NewsCube, so that as you're browsing, you can get other stories on the same topic you're looking at. The clustering is based on word similarity, but also autoclassification along left/right leaning of articles. You could use this to encourage exploration of what the other side says. It's for people who, in principle, would like to diversify news intake; this makes it easier to do so.

The second tool is called ['fact spreaders'](#) (link). The idea is that journalists create the fact checks, and few read them. So, it's focused on encouraging people to go reply to places the rumor is spreading, with a link back to the fact check. The example is 'Rick Santorum voted to fund Planned Parenthood.' They find the tweets that spread the rumor, then have a one click UI for people to reply, with a link to the factcheck.

The second example from fact spreaders: "Does Obama plan to raise taxes on the middle class in second term?" There are various potential matches. However, what's missing is a faster way for journalists to do a fact check about what's trending on twitter. The workflow:

1. ID rumor
2. Factcheck rumor
3. Spread the Factcheck

Gilad Lotan

of Social Flow: <http://www.socialflow.com/>

[Gilad's talk is pretty much summarized here: A Tale of Three Rumors:

<http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/truthiness/2012/03/05/541/>]

Gilad is the chief scientist at socialflow, they mine the full twitter and bit.ly firehose (a commercial infoproduct that gives full access to tweets w/their metadata). He tries to tell stories with it.

Turns out humans are somewhat understandable. We tend to tell stories about mornings in the morning, talk about coffee in the morning. When interesting events happen, it's very clear that they happen. One is a hashtag that goes viral, for example, [#BlameTheMuslims](#) Something starts locally, spreads, and dies down.

Gilad then contrasts this to how spambots work. You end up seeing very clear steps in the volume controlled by the spammers. Everyone talks about how huge Beiber is, but Gilad shows us Justin Bieber versus @pavel_globa (Pavel Globa), who is the most retweeted person on Twitter. Gilad then shows us SocialFlow's research on Trending Hashtags on Twitter

#OccupyWallStreet has a hard time competing with the Kardashians. This is an interesting example of how the algorithms privilege certain kinds of information (rapid breaking over slow breaking, for exampl).

Another example, from the spread of the news about the death of Osama bin Laden. Keith Urbahn first, and then Jake Sherman from Political shared it, and then Brian Stelter sets further context, which Gilad thinks led it to spread further.

Discussion

Eszter brings up algorithm literacy. What is a good point of intervention for this?

Comment: journalists are often amplifying these messages, true or not. Can we educate journalists and provide them with tools?

Sandvig: we haven't talked much about twitter as an intermediary. Can we create tools that are directed at groups like search engine intermediaries?

Eszter: martinlutherking.org comes up in the search results because lots of people point to it as a bad example

Bill Adair of Politifact: we shouldn't be just debunking falsehoods, but we should answer

people's curiosity. If we find something we're curious about, if we find it's true, we still publish a fact check about it. New York Times tool for debate nights, which lets people vote up fact checks, but sometimes people vote for things that weren't even said.

Question: could we have a fact-checking API? (answer: they exist)

Comment: Speed kills accuracy. I can't fact-check twitter and tweets. No one gets credit for not breaking a story. We have to do fact triage. Pre-propaganda: finding out someone's agenda before you talk with them.

Comment: the idea

- Track the history
- Track the money sources
- Egalitarian values related to algorithms

(shall we create a google spreadsheet?)

Sure. for hackathon! (I'm on it -- Natematias)

<http://bit.ly/truthicon-ideamatrix>

Last Session of the Day:

Interventions for institutions: Filters, Intermediaries, and Policies

Moderators: Zephyr Teachout, Micah Sifry

Craig Silverman

editor of "Regret the Error" and Adjunct Faculty at the Poynter Institute

@craigsilverman

People who spread misinformation are well organised, and the people fighting it are not as good, for reasons of funding, coordination, and perhaps rhetorical approach reasons. By "we" I mean the press, as well as social scientists.

(1930s) "Preliminary Notes on A Study of Newspaper Accuracy" Mitchell V. Charnley, University of Minnesota. Half of news stories had some kind of error (factual or out of context quotes). The range of inaccuracy for news articles (not editorials or opinion pieces) has been getting worse.

Scott Maier doing accuracy studies in the US and the EU

http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/press_box/2007/08/reign_of_error.html

Journalists use **corrections** “Empire Strikes Backstraat” isn’t the name of an actual street in Almere, the Netherlands. (Wall St. Journal). Craig Silverman [wrote for the CJR on the history of corrections policies](#). But there aren’t enough corrections, partly because newsrooms don’t know about all the errors they make.

Newspapers can ask readers to submit errors. Wikipedia is doing something similar, “Help improve this article. How can this article be improved?” It says, “tell us something, give us something, anything” - an onramp for participation and engagement
<http://www.columbiamissourian.com/stories/2011/11/11/show-me-error-contest-changes-its-rules/>

Journalists could use **Checklists**, to help journalists prevent themselves from making errors.
<http://www.scribd.com/doc/31924802/Checklist-Craig-Silverman-Regret-the-error>

Micah Sifry: on “trustiness” and the vision for the Sunlight Foundation’s software: Can we make a dashboard of what a congressman has voted on, who he’s getting money from, what his constituents are saying, who he’s meeting with.

Ellen Miller, from the Sunlight Foundation. Note: Micah Sifry is an advisor to the Sunlight Foundation. Zephyr Teachout worked on the Sunlight Foundation’s congressional schedule project.

The vision: is there one place where you can enter a search term and see everything you could find out about a company. What do they do in Washington or what they do at a State level. For example, the campaign finance website. But corporations aren’t enough to understand the influence industry. You have to understand lobbying and campaign finance. So Sunlight scraped [regulations.gov](#) to associate regulations to lobbying. They then looked at the EPA data to see how much a company is mentioned. Contractor misconduct information. They want to take information out of these large databases and make it personal. They built a site which makes it

Sunlight Foundation “[poligraph](#)” website to view news articles, filtered through the political relationships in the database. Also [an email plugin to do much the same](#). They’re testing ideas for an app which scans a barcode, determines which company makes the product, and look at what their campaign contribution profile looks like.

Joshua Benton

Director of the Nieman Journalism Lab at Harvard University.

He asks: why don’t journalists call out lies? Journalists sometimes don’t have the domain knowledge. Sometimes, the journalist relies on the source. There are also incentives which

push people towards an imagined centre which weighs multiple sides with similar weight.

Journalists are more likely to call someone out on a falsehood than they were in the past. The Internet has increased the amount of choice we have.

NPR ethics policy, “our goal is not to please those whom we report on or to produce stories that create the appearance of balance, but to seek the truth.” <http://ethics.npr.org/> But these debates have been put to the side. The truth is often there, but it’s buried in the 13th paragraph. In political debates, you have a fact-checking sidebar which is *on the side*. Sites like politifact are on another website.

Proposal: news organisations need to move towards making facts a center of their mission, rather than having fact-checking as an add-on. iPhone pop-up: “seriously, dude. Obama’s not spending \$200 million a day in India.” or “It looks like you’re curious about Obama’s birth certificate. Seriously, Obama was born in the United States. Hawaii, specifically. Here’s a link to his birth certificate.” We do this in advertising all the time, why don’t we use it for facts?

NYTimes twitter account could counter false information propagated by its own followers with better info.

Topic pages where the lead article is a debunking of something that needs to be debunked.

The work that news organizations are doing in sidebars and as ancillary projects needs to move to the center.

Rashad Robinson (@rashadrobinson): Executive director of color of change

Wants to inject some culture in the conversation. The reason we advocate for truth in the media is for our communities, for folks that we represent. We do this work because we want the world to look better for our kids in our communities down the line (shows pic of nephew and neice). Who gets to define who we are? Who gets to choose the labels that define us, the terms that are applied to us?

In 2009, Glenn Beck [called Obama a racist](#) with a deep-seated hatred for white people. Color of change mobilized over 285,000 of its members to get 300 advertisers to remove their sponsorship, making Beck unprofitable to Fox News. It was a victory, but not systemic. Shortly after, another host was on the air talking about Obama drinking in Ireland.

At [GLAAD](#), he did a lot of work w/AP around how Gay and Lesbian people are talked about. In

1973, the APA removed 'homosexuality' from its list of disorders. It was a clinical term, that is still used by people who oppose freedom and equality for gay and lesbian people. Washpo, Reuters, NYT, all listed 'homosexual' as a word that could still be used. The work started in the - 1980s to get the NYTimes to start using the word "Gay," along with the word homosexual - 1999: Gay: acceptable as popular synonym for both male and female homosexuals (n. and adj.), although it is generally associated with males, while lesbian is more common term for female homosexuals. - 2000 Gay: Acceptable as popular synonym for both male and female homosexual(n. and adj.), although it is generally associated with males, while lesbian is more common term for female homosexuals. - 2006 Gay used to describe men and women attracted to the same sex, though lesbian is more common term for women. Preferred over homosexual except.....(not all gotten)

That was a victory. Over time, the community started pushing the AP on removing the word homosexual from its style guide, and list it in its style guide as a pejorative term [note add style guides to toolkit for tomorrow].

They would start getting phone calls, and over 4 5 years, it got to the point where the AP had to decide what it would do next. Were they going to keep the word 'homosexual' in as a synonym for gay? A lot of back of forth, and eventually they removed the term and listed it as a pejorative. That's when the work intensified: we had to make phone calls every time it came up. Also, that's when our opponents stepped up: every time they saw the word 'gay' they would push to replace it with 'homosexual.' This leads to some interesting outcomes: Thomas Gay, Celtics player Rudy Gay, others had their names systematically replaced by American Family Association, leading to headlines like "Homosexual eases into 100 final at Olympic trials."

Words have the power to define a community. GLAAD worked with Gallup to try to get them to change their terms, but they were unwilling to change. So they found some polling Gallup did in the 1960s, "all things being equal, would you vote for a negro for president." They had made changes in terms of race, but they hadn't done so around gender.

This is about truth. It's about how folks are defined. We're saying 'is this a left or right conversation.' So I'll be transparent, if you poll it:

There's a 10 point difference between "would you be ok with homosexuals teaching your children?" and "would you be ok with a gay or lesbian teaching your children?" This is about how we are defined and see our communities. So it's really about how do we engage media not just to look at basic facts, but how do our lives, how is our dignity, and how do we get to define how we're talked about in the press.

Zephyr

I want to suggest some of the answers I have heard through the day.

Idea: There is more total political true information available to the public in the US than ever has been available

Concern: bias and systemic bias moving through media

Concern: we need to have precise granular information, people won't be able to connect the dots (Sunlight)

Concern: journalism as an institution still exists, and it can be better

Distinction: what are the lies that people believe? (politifact) What are the things that people don't know? (sunlight)

Question: what kinds of social false beliefs do we care about? are you concerned that 70% of American's believe that Stephen Colbert went to Dartmouth? Are you concerned about randomly distributed false beliefs, or just the ones that are highly aligned? Or mass systematic misbelief that are aligned, in areas that matter. Mass false beliefs about historical facts. False beliefs that are briefly held and rebutted in fact.

It may be that the anxiety expressed here is an anxiety about falsehood, but it might not actually be about information, but rather anxiety about power. If that anxiety is about power and not information, then the responses are different.

Historically, when we have thought about anxiety about power and political information, it has typically been for campaigns and lobbying. Our approaches have been legal, outlawing lobbying or to prevent other kinds of lobbying. We might limit coordination between powerful entities. We might require disclosure. We might break up power, or not allow subsidiary ownership.

There's a liberal tendency, the seduction of always wanting to have more information-- the idea that infinite information might help us act-- rather than looking at power and action.

Last Round of Questions

Melanie Sloan: one problem about false beliefs is religion-- which is all about mass false beliefs, and there are a lot of power issues tied in with religion. Maybe we're concerned primarily about falseness in the political sphere rather than falseness in general.

Chris: if you got the date of Mother's day wrong, someone will correct you. I'm interested in misinformation where when someone corrects you, you come up with an elaborate justification for what's right.

Question: I wonder if there's a cute cat theory of misinformation. (natematias: i missed it

because I was thinking about cats)

Question: narrative matters a lot more than specific facts. If we have a narrative that doesn't work for most people, "then you're screwed."

Question: is anyone doing history fact checking? Metaxas: different nations have different versions of history.

Comment: many people desire to have misinformation around history. Changing the history is deeply important to rolling back rights. There are lengthy and systematic efforts in Texas that people had to get onto the school board.

Question: The US has high religious belief. It's based on faith, not evidence. If you take a society that is deeply rooted in profound religious belief, and bring in lots of money, isn't that the key problem that you're talking about? Isn't it the combination of the Religious Right in combination with corporate money? I don't think you can fix that with a technical tool. A tool isn't going to convince someone who is a Christian to reconsider their belief system?

Micah Sifry: part of me wants to crawl into a little ball. On the other hand, I think of the way that attitudes in the US have changed. For example, public attitudes for marriage equality for gays and lesbians have shifted dramatically in a few years. I think the question we're trying to address here is, "is the digital networked public sphere in its commercial forms make the problem more or less tractable."

Micah Sifry: can we use the market because debunking improves relationships with readers and helps the bottom line, or we can campaign against a bad media actor through their advertisers? How much can we do through the market, and what can we do outside the market? We shouldn't expect the commercial media marketplace to fix it much-- yes, no, disagree?

Comment: It used to be that market forces made sense for newspapers to have foreign correspondents. The Internet has disincentivised smaller newspapers from having foreign correspondents, while it encouraged the most popular papers to do more. I worry about regional newspapers and city councils much more than the national level.

Bill Adair from Politifact: In readership surveys, we have seen that people love it. In Atlanta, the AJC is advertising politifact as something you get in the paper. <http://www.politifact.com/georgia/> Politifact's growth and revenue has come more from state partners than other sources.

Joe Torres from Free Press: doesn't the loss of reporters make it more difficult to check lies? We know that as newspapers cut reporters, we are losing journalists of color, so there is less reporting in our communities. It's a shame that Chicago Tribune only has three people covering Iraq, it makes it that much more difficult to counter lies. But then, the AP pooled during the US-Mexico war in the 1800s to spread propaganda and misinformation. So, it's not a new

challenge. But, the loss of reporters makes things more difficult.

Yochai Benkler: there are two different conceptions of what we care about at war with one another:

1. Facts that are amenable to fact-checking as an anchor. Is media framing a fact? It's more important than any particular fact. The imagination that you would have a checklist at the end of which you would be a clean professional who have done their job may be a problem. We may be building tools to let people spend another 5 to 10 years feeling good about their profession. Look at the Berman misinformation. Using Berman as a source would pass a checklist.
2. The relevant question is: how do we shape the narrative. It's an act of power. If you say to a journalist and say, "use this word because people like me more"

We should keep in mind that focusing on facts undermines the realisation that the real story is the shaping of the narrative.

Commenter: we need to reach out to young people and help them learn how to evaluate sources

Commenter: It wasn't until WW1 that most newspapers had reporters. The whole idea of verifying information was not there. The introduction of propaganda techniques in WW1 drove the invention of reporters as something which is a part of journalism today. The propagandists of today have become so sophisticated that they have captured the journalistic model that has been in effect since after WW1 and wrecked it. We're dealing around the edges of an extremely large shift in what journalism is. Is this facts, or narrative, or all of these? All these questions are becoming something we don't quite what it is yet. Let's poke at this and learn more truth about what journalism is.

Wendell Potter: You're trying to refute emotionally received information with emotional information. You can't really persuade people. There needs to be greater work by journalists and others to expose where this is coming from, and see if the net can be used to counter lies in language they can understand.

Yochai: To respond to Ethan's challenge of action. We can select from a set of tools:

- clustering of stories (Paul Resnick)
- diagnosing as left or right certain characteristics
- churnalism.com
- Ingmar's Yahoo Research political search terms project

Mapping of the spread of words, stories, meanings: These are ways that don't focus on facts, but are efforts to combine tools to map memes and phrases to parties and sources and positions. We need to know *who is trying to persuade us*.

Sasha: Check out our ideas matrix: (<http://bit.ly/truthicon-ideamatrix>) if you were trying to spread falsehoods, what tools might you like to use?

Final Session: Onward!

Ethan Zuckerman and Colin Maclay

Takeaways **(incomplete)**:

- Truth and lies are communicative acts
- Communicative acts are sensitive to power
- We should prioritise power relationships
- Our search for truth ends at borders of our culture
- We should develop tools to overcome the borders of our culture
- fidelity to the knowable
- don't focus on the misinformation, focus on the system
- educate people about how the web works
- narratives of reality might be dependent on fact checking, but it depends on fact checking
- Let's fact check and verify the truth
- Appeal to people's sense of justice and the values behind their beliefs
- Note: we are in danger of talking about using algorithms to regulate speech
- What is the goal of truth?
- For factors which shape political beliefs over a lifetime, how do we get socialised to not believe facts when we see them
- What can we learn from history?
- How can we understand the trust networks (health)
- Community: how do we evolve communities of trust?
- How can we learn from Wikipedia?

Tractable questions:

- How do we protect people on the pointy edge of fact-checking from bad actors (flackcheck)
- detect the difference between spreading the truth and spreading the lies
- tools to surface context automatically
- create crowdsourcing and crowds
- Where is the distinction between R/L relevant and where is it not?
- How do we find the moment when someone is most open to a debunk
- Reputation engine for trustiness
- inform consumers about media they consume
- **Can we track the successful shift away from hateful terms to preferred terms**
- How do we use bots for good
- Engage citizens to assist with fact-checking
- How do we help organisations resonate their voices louder?
- Can we better visualise these kinds of results
- How can we measure filter bubbles?
- Map the space of belief versus fact better in order to understand the effect that evidence can have
- Can we build algorithms that optimise for an informed public, not just for novelty?

- Can we incentivise truth by increasing the return people get for being correct
- Marketplace of ideas
- What will journalists need to do their job?
- Judith: in order to motivate the crowdsourcing of truth assistance, we need to be able to help people understand the cost they will bear from the dissemination of a particular falsehood
- Can we quantify the relationship between ownership, employment, and framing on different platforms by gender and race
- Make fact-checking profitable
- How do we make it easier for journalists to use other sources than PR?

Ethan: it's wonderful that we started with Wendell Potter's story of someone who moved from the side of spin to the side of fact-checking. As we think about these questions-- the big questions of frame, what are other stories we can find of people who made the decision to look at the world very differently. [Richard Cizik](#).

<<CURRENT NOTES HERE>>

LIVENOTES FROM PREVIOUS SESSIONS

<== *After a session is over, we'll move notes to individual pads*==>

- **Early Morning Session:** <http://etherpad.mit.edu/truthicon-earlymorning>
- **Biases Abound: We Can't Handle (or Don't Want) the Truth**
<http://etherpad.mit.edu/truthicon-biases>
- **Inflection Point** (Nesson) <http://etherpad.mit.edu/truthicon-inflectionpoint>
- **Interventions for Individuals: Tools and Personal Empowerment** (Sandvig, Hargittai, Metaxas, Paul Resnick, Lotan): <http://etherpad.mit.edu/truthicon-tools-empowerment>
- **Interventions for Institutions: Filters, Intermediaries, and Policies** (Teachout, Sifry, Silverman, Miller, Benton, Robinson): <http://etherpad.mit.edu/truthicon-institutions>
- **Onward!** (Zuckerman, Maclay) <http://etherpad.mit.edu/truthicon-onward>

BIKE RACK

(drop stuff here if you're not sure where to put it)

- @slifty's short form notes: <http://etherpad.mit.edu/truthicon-slifty>