Journalism and Misinformation

Supply, Demand, Scale

Dan Gillmor



Situation

- Too much misinformation comes from traditional media.
- Journalism is an attack surface—and part of the solution.
- Media literacy—the demand side—is vital.

Obligatory reminder...

This isn't new.



the Ship Was Destroyed on Purpose.

Current conditions in journalism

- Amplifiers for deceit
- Often unaware of being used
 - Inadequate detection and response
- 24-hour news cycle => 1,400-minute news cycle
- Major financial challenges

Among journalism's pretenses:

- Our work speaks for itself.
- We got the whole story.
- If we ever covered it, you have the context.
- Even though breaking news is inherently flawed, trust us anyway.

Hypothesis:

People get more misinfo from traditional media than social media*



Why Fears of Fake News Are Overhyped

A top political scientist reveals new research showing a sharp drop-off in fake news since 2016





*This needs serious research!

Illustration: Yoshi Sodeoka

"The most worrisome misinformation in U.S. politics remains the old-fashioned kind: false and misleading statements made by elected officials who dominate news coverage and wield the powers of government."

--Brendan Nyhan, Dartmouth College

But this is new (or at least recent):

The disinformation-technical-political-industrial complex.



Whether "post-fact" or propaganda, the public sphere is inundated with problematic information. Lexicon of Lies is an essential guide by Data & Society Postdoctoral Scholar Caroline Jack that

FIRSTDRAFT

7 TYPES OF MIS- AND DISINFORMATION



No intention to cause harm but has potential to fool



Misleading use of information to frame an issue or individual



IMPOSTER CONTENT

When genuine sources are impersonated



New content is 100% false, designed to deceive and do harm



FALSE CONNECTION

When headlines, visuals or captions don't support the content



FALSE CONTEXT

When genuine content is shared with false contextual information



MANIPULATED CONTENT

When genuine information or imagery is manipulated to deceive

Source: First Draft

And it will get much, much worse...

MARK FRAUENFELDER / 8:30 AM MON JUL 17, 2017

Fake Obama speech is the beginning of the end of video evidence



Journalism is a key attack surface.

Deceitful people:

- Hack journalistic norms
 - "Both sides"
- Provide ratings/clickbait catnip (\$\$\$)
 - o e.g. Trump in 2015-16
- Trick news orgs into running outright BS
 - e.g. scientific "studies" paid for by vested interests
- Leverage technology and networks to promote false memes
 - o "It's out there."

Hacking journalistic norms





"It May Not Be Good for America, but It's Damn Good for CBS"

-- Les Moonves, CBS CEO (February, 2016)



How Theranos used the media to create the emperor's new startup *John Naughton*

With £10bn and a pretty face, fraudster Elizabeth Holmes blinded some of the most respected journalists in the industry



▲ Elizabeth Holmes falsely promised to revolutionise the blood-testing industry. Photograph: Courtesy of Theranos



Anatomy of a Fake News Scandal

Inside the web of conspiracy theorists, Russian operatives, Trump campaigners and Twitter bots who manufactured the 'news' that Hillary Clinton ran a pizza-restaurant child-sex ring



Carmen Kat'z Facebook post likely set Pizzagate in motion. "Someone or some group possibly took this unwitting woman and made her the source that they need." says Watts.

"...web of conspiracy theorists, Russian operatives, Trump campaigners and Twitter bots who manufactured the 'news' that Hillary Clinton ran a pizza-restaurant child-sex ring."

Journalists need to:

- Understand how they're being used
 - Don't chase the latest shiny objects
- Rethink some traditional norms
 - ...such as amplifying falsehoods
- Learn math/statistics
 - Put risk in context
- Fill "data voids" with trustworthy info
- And that's just for starters...



The Oxygen of Amplification

Better Practices for Reporting on Extremists, Antagonists, and Manipulators

Whitney Phillips

Medium

Dear Journalists, Stop Being Loudspeakers for Liars

An open letter to newsrooms everywhere







Sarah Huckabee Sanders, who is paid to lie for the Trump administration. Photo: Alex Wong/Getty





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ANALYSIS

America's Faulty Perception of Crime Rates





America's crime rates are at their lowest point in decades. So why do so many Americans think crime is going up?



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Yes!!!!

Coronavirus 'Hits All the Hot Buttons' for How We Misjudge Risk

Psychologists say that differing responses to coronavirus and the flu illustrate our shortcomings when it comes to evaluating danger.



The coronavirus panic illustrates the flaws in how human beings assess risk. Amanda Mustard for The New York Times

But no mention of news (and entertainment) media's role in fueling fear...

Caution: The "Do Something!" Brigades

The New York Times

Opinion

The Poison on Facebook and Twitter Is Still Spreading

Social platforms have a responsibility to address misinformation as a systemic problem, instead of reacting to case after case.

By The Editorial Board

The editorial board represents the opinions of the board, its editor and the publisher. It is separate from the newsroom and the Op-Ed section.

More v

Do what, exactly?

The New Editors of the Internet

Latest

In a small number of Silicon Valley conference rooms, decisions are being made about what people should and shouldn't see online—without the accountability or culture that has long accompanied that responsibility.



Docklandsboy/Flickr

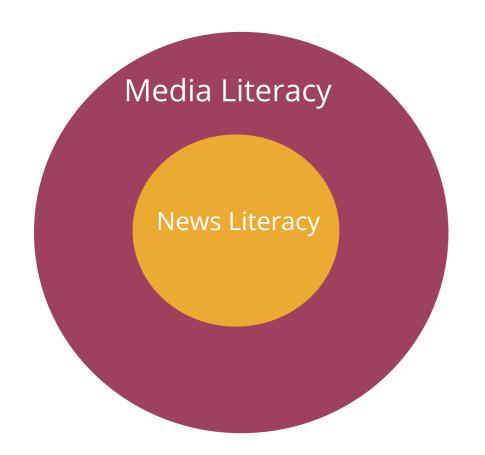
We can't just upgrade supply. We have to upgrade *us*.

At scale.

One way to help improve demand: media/news literacy

It needs journalism's help.

(And yours...)



Media literacy: The ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create and act on media messages in all forms.

News literacy: Applying these critical thinking skills in the context of news information.

*Consuming and creating media with integrity is key

"News fluency"

Part of a combination of related "literacies"

- Information
- Digital
- Media
- News
- Network
- plus
- Data (math, stats, etc.)
- Science
- and more...

Improving demand:

Who's responsible?
How do we make it scale?

Educators at all levels



Courses ▼ Programs ▼ Schools & Partners

About -

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Home > All Subjects > Communication > Media LIT: Overcoming Information Overload



Media LIT: Overcoming Information Overload

Take control of information overload and make media serve *you* better.



Principles for "Consumers"

- Be skeptical
- Use judgment
- Ask questions
- Challenge assumptions
- Understand how media work

Media—including news organizations









Principles for "Creators"

- Thoroughness
- Accuracy
- Fairness
- Independence
- Transparency: first step in bringing news literacy principles to audience



TRANSPARENCY PROJECT

SCIENCE & SOCIETY

Introducing the Transparency Project



Technology companies



Why tech platforms should give users more control — and how they can do it





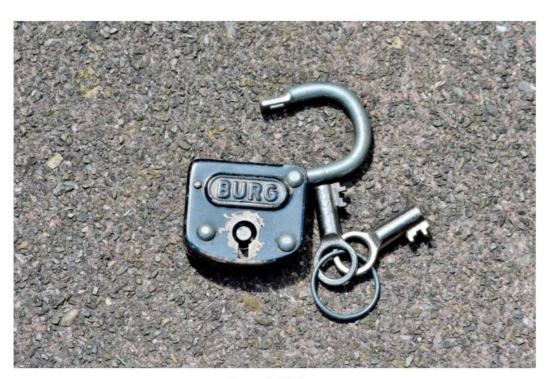


Image via Pixabay

Collaborate.



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