Fake News on Social Media
Critical Thinking in the Digital Environment

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Session overview & goals

1. Participants will understand teaching approaches and tools that can be used to critically evaluate information found on social media.

2. Participants will gain hands on experience on how the features of Twitter can be used to judge credibility.

3. Participants will discuss and share some of the ethical, social, and technological issues that affect online news literacy.
Fake news

What

Why

Crisis of authenticity and expertise
Challenges to information consumers

- Information overload
  - Speed vs. accuracy
- Information selection
  - Overcoming our own (Confirmation) biases
- Information filtering
  - through implicit selection of information source and social algorithms
Liberal arts goals extends to Digital environment

Critical and Creative Inquiry:

“The ability to gather, analyze, and critically evaluate information…. “

Digital Humanities Minor Program at St Kate intends to address this by enhancing digital literacy and information technology skills grounded in a broad liberal arts foundation
What do you think as the most important aspects of fake news phenomena on social media particularly related to your teaching area?
Types of misleading news

- Fake news
- Misleading news
- Highly partisan news
- Clickbait
- Satire
- Mistakes
The digital news environment

- Post-truth environment ("alternative facts")
- Viral posts on social media
  - Confirmation bias
  - Filter bubbles
- Gatekeepers bypassed
- Critical role of verification
Top fake political news stories

5 Top Fake Political News Stories On Facebook

“Obama Signs Executive Order Banning The Pledge Of Allegiance In Schools Nationwide” ABCNews.com.co

2,177,000 Facebook shares, comments, and reactions

“Pope Francis Shocks World, Endorses Donald Trump for President, Releases Statement” Ending the Fed

961,000

“Trump Offering Free One-Way Tickets to Africa & Mexico for Those Who Wanna Leave America” tmzhiphop.com

802,000

“FBI Agent Suspected in Hillary Email Leaks Found Dead in Apparent Murder-Suicide” Denver Guardian

567,000

“RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE To Reunite And Release Anti Donald Trump Album” heaviermetal.net

560,000

Engagement refers to the total number of shares, reactions, and comments for a piece of content on Facebook.

Source: BuzzSumo
Obama Signs Executive Order Banning the Pledge of Allegiance

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP) — Early this morning, President Obama made what could very well prove to be the most controversial move of his presidency with the signing of an Executive Order banning the Pledge of Allegiance in all public schools around the country.
News literacy practices

Evaluate the source

- Is the URL questionable?
- Is the author named and thus **accountable**?
- Is the author a journalist with professional responsibility to **verify** information?
- Is it a retweet from someone who has no way of knowing if the information is reliable?
- Is it from a partisan in a dispute or an **independent** source?
Verify the quality of evidence

Read beyond the headline
- Does the headline match the information in the article?
- Are other news outlets reporting it?

Check the date

Trace a story back to the original sources
- Examine & evaluate linked sources

Are quotes authentic?
- Do a verbatim Google search

Are photos credible?
- Do a reverse image search
Consult fact-checkers and experts

Fact-checkers

- Snopes
- FactCheck.org
- PolitiFact
- Washington Post Fact Checker
- Snopes' Field Guide to Fake News Sites and Hoax Purveyors

Experts

- Ask experts you know
- Research what experts say
News literacy habits of mind

- Distinguish between news, opinion & misinformation
- Check our biases
- Seek out information that challenges our point of view
- Be wary of superlatives
- Triple check before we share
News literacy education

**Center for News Literacy**, Stony Brook University

- [Making Sense of the News: News Literacy Lessons for Digital Citizens](#)

**Poynter Institute**

- International Fact-Checking Network
- Free courses & webinars on fact-checking

**Journalist’s Resource**, Harvard Kennedy School, Shorenstein Center

- [Fake news and the spread of misinformation](#)

**News Literacy Project**

- [checkology Virtual Classroom](#) (K-12)

Other Actions You Can Take to Stop the Spread of Fake News

• Question even credible news sources
• Customize your social media experience
  – Example: Twitter
How to Question Credible News Sources

Context:

- Fake news can be aided by conventional news sources when journalists fail to verify content before reporting it.
- Lies can spread much further than the truth.
- News organizations often print updates, but many do not.
1. Claim: Mass grave found in Mexico holds bodies of missing students.

Status: False
Originated: October 5
Resolved: October 14
Number of news organizations that covered the claim: 14
Number that updated/followed up: 5
Percentage that updated/followed up: 35.7


**Status**: True

**Originated**: October 21

**Resolved**: October 22

**Number of news organizations that covered the claim**: 13

**Number that updated/followed up**: 7

**Percentage that updated/followed up**: 54

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Hedging Words:

- Specific words used to signal unverified information.
- Well established in journalism.
- Readers may not fully understand the implications.
Most Common Hedging Words:

- **Report** (and its variations): 29.2%
- **Use of quotes**: 11.7%
- **Say** (and its variations): 11.1%
- **Use of a question**: 10.4%
- **Claim** (and its variations): 8.7%

Example:

“Islamist websites **claim** Israeli-Canadian woman kidnapped by IS: **report**.”
How to Question Credible News Sources

What examples of hedging (i.e. unverified claims) can you find in some of the trending news stories today?
How to Reduce Fake News in Twitter

Customize your timeline (news feed)

• Separate personal and professional Twitter accounts
• Follow credible sources
• Research hashtags
• Verify “trending” hashtags before forwarding
Why Twitter?

- Interact directly with knowledge industries
- Journalist seem to prefer it to convey breaking news
- Access to editors and writers working outside academe
- Easy to share your expertise
How to Reduce Fake News in Twitter

Twitter Features

• Locate ongoing conversations using hashtags
  – #2016election

• Follow experts, credible sources, interesting people

• Experience customized based on your interests
  – remove irrelevant suggestions
How to Reduce Fake News in Twitter

Twitter Account for TLN:

- Username: 2017TLN
- Password: 2017Teaching&Learning
How to Reduce Fake News in Twitter

Tools for locating credible/known academic sources:

- Academic lists:
  

- Academic hashtags:
  
  [https://www.insidehighered.com/twitter_directory](https://www.insidehighered.com/twitter_directory)
You Can Help Reduce Fake News

• Recognize hedging words
• Add sources you trust to your social media timelines
• Share or post only stories you know to be true, from sources you know to be responsible
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