

# Evaluating Information in the Post-truth Era (後真相時代的資訊辨識)

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# A Post-truth Era

- “Post-truth” is the 2016 International Word of the Year by Oxford Dictionaries

# Defining “Post-truth”

Oxford Dictionaries:

- Post-truth is the circumstance in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief

(訴諸情感及個人信念，較陳述客觀事實更能影響輿論的情況。)

- Information overload
- Misinformation and fake news spread around

# Rumor and Propaganda in History

- Neither false news, hidden advertising nor hate speech were invented in our time.
- What is new is the scope and therefore the danger these forces represent.

# New Ecosystem of the Media and Information Environment

- Power shift: everyone is a prosumer
- Mobile phone: convenient for photo and video taking/ immediacy
- Social media & Instant Messaging: Affordances
  - Persistence: the durability of expression and content
  - Visibility
  - Connectivity
  - Spreadability/ sharable
  - Searchability
- Echo Chamber Effect

- Advanced digital technologies

- AI: with the help of bots
- (e.g., Twitter bots)
- Click farms
- Deepfake

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZLYRb6VECbo>

- Content farms

- 鏗鏘集: 「內容農場」
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMDJb37oyZ4>

# Types of Fake News & Misinformation

- Six major types of fake news
  - Clickbait
  - Propaganda
  - Satire/Parody
  - Sloppy journalism
  - Misleading headings
  - Biased/slanted news

# Truth vs. Post-Truth

(by Clement So, CUHK)

| Truth                   | Post-Truth                           |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Facts                   | Beliefs, emotions                    |
| Based on reality        | Unrestrained construction of reality |
| Science as basis        | Politics, vested interests           |
| Objectivity as criteria | Subjectivity, biased                 |
| Accuracy                | Mis-information, sensationalism      |



# Mindset (處理資訊的心態)

- The Crisis of Trust

- The spread of digital technology, creating vast data trails with the latent potential to contradict public statements
- Too much information, too many controversies
- Digital technologies facilitate spread of conspiracy theories
- An increasing skeptical citizenry
- Do not trust the government, journalists & professionals
- Everyone has their own truth-tellers
- Questions of where to look, what to focus on and who to trust are ones that we increasingly seek to answer for ourselves, without the help of intermediaries
- Charge of bias → not my perspective

- Value-driven Mindset

- Post-truth society: emotion > fact

- Predisposition/ value takes over reality check

- (立場先行；雄辯勝事實)

- Endorse like-minded peers' information (撐同溫層資訊)

- Criticize/attack opposing views

- Fox TV Station → criticizes → CNN

- 盲目拒絕相信一切有害自己的資訊；盲目相信接受有利自己的資訊

# **Evaluating Skills for News and Information**

# 1. News and Information Source

- Anonymous source?
- Official source?
- Reliable source?
  - From unfamiliar organization, check their “about us” section to learn more
- A friend?
  - Ask for your friend’s source

# Understanding the background of the news organizations

## Select Credible News Media

- What is a good news media organization?
  - Implement the social functions of news media
  - Professional production and presentation with good taste
    - Truth, objectivity, fair and justice, not sensational

# Comparing different information sources

- Traditional newspaper
- TV & radio
- Online media (網媒)
- Citizen journalism
- Bloggers
- Social media and instant messaging apps  
(最多假消息?)
- Others

## **2. Assess the Content and Look for Comprehensiveness & Bias**

- Hying
- Framing

# Comparing the news angles; Separating opinions from facts

- How the story was told in different ways



# Who's point of view?

- What is the argument? What is the evidence?

# The public opinion poll

## Who conducts the poll?

- Government
- Media
- Interest groups/  
pressure groups
- Business organizations
- Academics
- Research centers

## How to evaluate it?

- The name of the sponsor/ the name of the researcher
- Purpose of the study
- Dates of fieldwork
- Universe or population to which the results of the survey are projected
- Method by which the sample was selected
- Sample size
- Response rate of the survey
- Precision of the findings; estimates of sampling error

# 3. Seeing is not Believing

(photo: Annie Lab)



# Verifying the photos

Online tools that help to verify the authenticity of a photo:

- TinEye

<https://tineye.com/>

- Google Search by Image

- How to Use Google Reverse Image Search to Fact Check Images

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5e9wTdAulA>

- InVid – video verification

# Live broadcasting

- Live streaming on social media, TV and websites

# 4. Sharing

- What is the source?
- If it is marked as “fact checked,” is there any supporting evidence?
- If it is stated as “reported by news media” (新聞有報), any news link? You should check the official news site.
- If there is a link provided, check the link. The information may come from a content farm or unknown website.

# The Importance of Fact Check

## Fact-checking Centers:

- International Fact-checking Network
- Africa Check
- Taiwan Factcheck Centre
- HKU: Annie Lab (Bookmarks on Coronavirus Misinformation)
- Kau Yim ( (求驗傳媒)
- HKBU FactCheck Service (浸大事實查核中心)
- Factcheck Lab (事實查核實驗室)

# Tips for spotting false news (by Facebook)

- Be skeptical of headlines
- Look closely at the URL
- Investigate the source
- Watch for unusual formatting
- Consider the photos
- Inspect the dates
- Check the evidence
- Look at other reports
- Is the story a joke?
- Some stories are intentionally false



# **Mindsets and Information Processing**

Why you think you're right, even when  
you're wrong?

Soldier mindset VS Scout mindset

- **Combat Soldiers:**
  - Regardless of the time and place
  - Their adrenaline is elevated
  - Their actions stem from your deeply ingrained reflexes
  - Reflexes that are rooted in a need to protect themselves and their side, and to defeat the enemy

- Scouts:
  - Their job is not to attack or defend
  - It is to understand
  - They are the people going out, mapping the terrain, identifying potential obstacles
  - Wants to know what is really out there as accurately as possible

# Motivated Reasoning: Combat Soldier Mindset

- A phenomenon in which our unconscious motivations, desires and fears shape the way we interpret information.
- Some pieces of information feel like our allies
  - we want them to win; we want to defend them
- Other information are the enemy
  - We want to shoot them down

# Scout Mindset

- The drive not to make one idea win and another lose
- Attempt to see the facts and evidence as objectively as you can
- To see what is there as honestly and accurately as you can even if it is not pretty, convenient or pleasant
- To cut through one's own prejudices, biases and motivations
- They are less likely to say that someone who changes his mind seems weak
- Their self-worth as a person isn't tied to how right or wrong they are about any particular topic

# If we really want to improve our judgment as individual ...

## To use scout mindset

- To learn how to feel proud instead of ashamed when we notice we might have been wrong about something
- To learn how to feel intrigued instead of defensive when we encounter some information that contradicts our beliefs
- What do you most yearn for?
  - To defend your own beliefs or to see the world as clearly as you possibly can?

# **Guiding the Students**



# 1. Understanding How Misinformation Spreads

- The impact of the technologies
- Social media & instant messaging apps
  - The importance of social media literacy
- Lack of fact check
- The impact of misinformation

## 2. Nurturing Three Thinking Skills

- **Critical Thinking Skill**
  - Fact check & evaluate a story
- **Reflective Thinking Skill**
  - Understand the pre-disposition of oneself
  - Adopt the correct mindset for information processing, be open-minded
  - Be aware of the consequence of sharing
  - Avoid echo chamber effect
- **Positive Thinking Skill**
  - Passion & compassion
  - Public good

# 3. Beware of the Headlines

- What kind of emotion the headline gives you?
  - scared, panic, angry, sad, exciting, ecstatic, sympathetic
- Attractive headlines?
- What action suggested to take?
- Read the whole story, not just the headline

## 4. Value Education

VALUES

A hand holding a red marker is shown writing the word "VALUES" in large, bold, red capital letters. The hand is positioned on the right side of the word, with the marker tip touching the letter 'S'. The background is plain white.

# 5. Doing Exercise

- How social media shape our relationship to and understanding of breaking news events?
  - How do we know if information shared on social media is credible?
  - What is the relationship between social media and the practice of quality journalism.
- Find out cases of fake news
  - Evaluate the cases
  - Discuss the impact of the fake news

*Thank you!*

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