Fake News and the Academy

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So... what are we talking about when we say “fake news”?

Fake news:
* Outright fake stuff (for money)
But same skills needed to be critical about:
* Badly reported stuff (too quickly, or just sloppily)
* Stats / news reports / quotes taken out of context

This is not a media problem or an internet problem or a social media problem. This is not a “young people these days!” kind of problem. It is a problem we all are prone to and guilt of and forced into… It’s a multifaceted, complex issue that has been building over time

This is more of an issue of education and awareness. Which is a good thing. We can’t “ban” information; but we sure can teach better information consumption.

What we’re going to cover today are reasons we got to this place; why it is getting to be a bigger issue; and, most importantly, what we can do about it as educators.
(Images included here mean something with a story to follow.)
Old way: on screen TV guide showed you the line up of shows the network will be showing
New way: Netflix queue collects what YOU add and makes suggestions for you based on what YOU have already watched. This is the obvious way we see the rise in “customized information delivery”

Per GKL’s comments: use this as springboard to say this goes beyond entertainment. All websites are learning preferences and tailoring suggestions based on your history rather than general delivery of a standard set of stories.
More and more information is being tailored to our interests and delivered. With so much info, this is a necessity. But dangers exist, too.

**Positives**
* Saves time  
* Enriches experiences with interests  
* Deepens expertise  
* Takes away a human gatekeeper

**Negatives**
* Minimizes serendipity  
* Minimizes experience with “other”  
* Entrenches in interest / opinion silos  
* Introduces a computer gatekeeper

Why the pic of Independence Day? That’s one of my favorite movies, but it is in a genre I have no real interest in. I just happened to get hung up watching it. Serendipity brought me a new thing. Hard to do now.

Our communication media are made up of networks of self-chosen likeminded people (social media) and filtering algorithms. Like Netflix shows you what you have chosen to add to your queue, social media shows you who you have chosen to follow. We rarely can see what’s outside of our friend/family circles (and we tend to have similar beliefs as friends and family) or our own interests / ideals (why would you follow someone that makes you mad?).

And even when we think we’re breaking free of our “bubble” and looking outside for new things, technology still filters for us....

Eli Pariser: “invisible algorithmic editing of the web”
Inherent search issues

Search results are only as good as the search request input. And more importantly, results are not neutral.

* Information overload and shorter attention spans drive people to look for easy answers, devoid of historical context.

* “Satisficing” - how the quality of information is compromised when people search for what is convenient and accept that information as sufficient.

* Humans develop algorithms, and human biases are built in. And we don’t know what they are.

* Searching finds what you ask for. If you ask for the wrong thing, it brings back results for that wrong thing.

2 issues here: Misinformation via search, and misinformation via social media feeds

We covered the passive receipt of info (customized info delivery), but constraints happen with more active searching, as well.
The case of Dylann Roof

“The event that truly awakened me was the Trayvon Martin case. I kept hearing and seeing his name, and eventually I decided to look him up. I read the Wikipedia article and right away I was unable to understand what the big deal was. It was obvious that Zimmerman was in the right. But more importantly this prompted me to type in the words “black on White crime” into Google, and I have never been the same since that day. The first website I came to was the Council of Conservative Citizens. There were pages upon pages of these brutal black on White murders. I was in disbelief. At this moment I realized that something was very wrong. How could the news be blowing up the Trayvon Martin case while hundreds of these black on White murders got ignored?

“From this point I researched deeper and found out what was happening in Europe. I saw that the same things were happening in England and France, and in all the other Western European countries. Again I found myself in disbelief. As an American we are taught to accept living in the melting pot, and black and other minorities have just as much right to be here as we do, since we are all immigrants. But Europe is the homeland of White people, and in many ways the situation is even worse there. From here I found out about the Jewish problem and other issues facing our race, and I can say today that I am completely racially aware.”


This powerful example from Safiya Noble illustrates the problems with building a life vision and world understanding within the limitations of simple searching: easy answers; no historical context; satisfied with early results; algorithms tailored to personal history; finding what you asked for rather than what you needed
Cognitive biases

Nature takes shortcuts, and our human brains are nature. Shortcuts are wired into our thinking.

We've got the media cards stacked against us. The ball is in our court to figure out how to drink from this firehose of information. (idiom / cliche explosion!)

But our own nature is set to make that difficult, too.

Probably don’t need to spend too much time on this. But it’s a reminder. Like waterfalls (the pic of Niagara Falls) take shortcuts to get water to the lowest point quickly, our brains take short cuts to come to an understanding quickly.

Big cognitive short cuts (aka cognitive biases) to be aware of are confirmation bias, selective perception, choice-support bias, availability heuristic The Business Insider infographic is really stellar.

Awareness is key!
Thoughts?

How do you think we got here?
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<th>Is it?</th>
<th>Changes in industry</th>
<th>Assumption of understanding</th>
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3 reasons why what is happening seems to be worse.
Is it getting worse?

Fake news has been around a long time. It just had different names. Like *propaganda* and *tabloids*.

And one of those reasons is that it isn’t really. Don’t blame big bad social media for ruining everything. We’ve been falling for propaganda and reading tabloids for a long time.

Not a new thing: Media literacy has long been an issue.
Content farms, clicks and $$$.
The information industry is built more than ever on popularity and money.

So much is available and attention spans are so fleeting. Soon we will be on to the next best thing. Industries have responded to this by capitalize on the popular.
Subscription numbers as a whole don’t matter as much as ad click-throughs. Before, publications were subscribed to as a whole. Now, individual articles or monetized.
This leads to the next part. We are bombarded by information. But can we understand it?

Read the billboards on the left. Then read the billboards on the right. We can read the left not because they are there, but because most of us US-born people have been taught to read English. The billboards on the right are around us every day, but we can’t read them because most US-born people never been taught to read this language. Being around words doesn’t make us literate; being around computer technologies doesn’t make us digitally literate, either.
Assumption of understanding

We assume people know how to search and evaluate. But why? No one has been taught this. And even fewer really understand how the information landscape works.

And we are not teaching people how to “read” online. We can not assume that students coming in know how to critically evaluate. They have not be taught. Schools aren’t covering it. How could they? So how would students know how to read these signs?

Why mention libraries / librarians? They are the traditional “experts” in this area. Without them, teaching about the information landscape falls to teachers. But in high school, teachers, too, are rushed to cover a lot of content for testing and assessment. They can barely cover all of the content they need without having to take on more expertise.

Also, I think the thing with fake news is also learning about the media landscape, about how journalism is produced, how websites are produced, and political literacy (what is the left vs. the right vs. the “alt-right,” and what signals/vocabulary/POVs speak to each of those sides?). It’s not just about going through the steps of evaluation -- if you don’t have the knowledge of what good journalism looks like, and what bias looks like, and enough knowledge of the content of the article to recognize what is being left out, it can be really hard to detect bias, even if you go through the steps of Who/What/When/Where/Why or CRAAP or whatever. Again, may I refer us to: https://hapgood.us/2016/12/19/yes-digital-literacy-but-which-one/
Thoughts?

Why do you think it’s getting worse? Or is it?
What do we do about it?

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<th>Celebrate that a lot of people do get it</th>
<th>Go over evaluation strategies for all information</th>
<th>Hold students accountable for sources</th>
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<td>Discourage the notion that information exists in a vacuum, and that a complicated issue with historical roots can be understood by reading a few articles</td>
<td>Make covering these issues intentional and share what you are doing with your colleagues.</td>
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These will be elucidated on the following slides
Rejoice! This is not a lost cause!

Is the direness of the situation itself a bit of “fake news”? Maybe. We might not be as gullible as we’re lead to believe.

Impromptu “graffiti board” poll at SMC last week:
* news sources are diverse
* “traditional” media is still ranked pretty high
* classes and professors are a source!

Social media use is still sky high. But maybe not quite what you’d expect. 79% of “online adults” use Facebook (68% of all American adults); 24% use Twitter. (Pew 2016). And look deeper at those demographics!

In a recent NYU/Stanford/NBER study, participants recalled seeing and believing fake “fake news” stories at the same rates as “fake news” stories that actually circulated. Perhaps fake news is not changing minds so much as confirming what we already think.
Evaluation strategies

Move beyond the “checklist” style of evaluation and help students with more sophisticated strategies.

Bare minimum:
* Evaluation checklists
* Domain-name evaluation

Next level:
* Media literacy: what does objective journalism look like?
* Information literacy: attention to how is info created, circulated, valued, shared. What is the conversation?
* Civics literacy: what is the role of government and citizens in the US?
* Digital literacy: how does the Internet work? How is content created and shared? What are the financial incentives?
* Rhetorical literacy: detecting tone, satire, etc.

Student have not been taught this in depth. If they have gotten it, they have gotten the “old fashioned” “CRAAP” kinds of checklists for evaluations. Or, “.coms are bad; .govs are good” kind of lectures. They remember those but aren’t applying more sophisticated strategies. They need to be taught those by faculty or librarians.
Resource accountability

Students take issues seriously when you speak in their currency: grades.

Ideas:

* Give context to why you are assigning the readings / information and where they came from
* Include very clear guidelines for acceptable resources in rubrics. Grade accordingly
* Include an assignment specifically about resource evaluation
* Have students include written reasons for choosing sources (and for not including sources)

And don’t let them BS these assignments. Including the Onion as a source in an annotated bibliography should not fly. Allow them space for reflection on how they found the information they did and what strategies they might want to find next time. If you’re going to forbid a kind of source or search engine, have a discussion about why that source is not appropriate.
Making assignments is hard. So see what others have done and share what you do.

Online assignment resources:

* MERLOT (Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching) [CSU system]

* CORA (Community of Online Research Assignments) [Loyola Marymount University]

* Google Doc of fake news resources by Steve Runge, librarian at Boston College
What are YOU already doing about it?

Your answers...
Eli Pariser's book, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding from You*

“Beware online ‘filter bubbles’“ TED talk by Eli Pariser (8 minutes)

Stanford researchers find students have trouble judging the credibility of information online (or 4-minute NPR clip about it)

*Chronicle Review’s Post-Truth Issue*


Others

http://www.journalism.org/2016/12/15/many-americans-believe-fake-news-is-sowing-confusion/