Post-Truth

Developing a KO Community Response

Discussion Briefing for the ISKO Annual Conference, London, September 2017, by David Clarke
In 2016 we experienced a fake news epidemic
Definition

‘post-truth, relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.’

In 2016 ‘post-truth’ became:

The Internet democratised information

The Internet democratised the world of information. It levelled the playing field between citizens and institutions, and it gave a voice to many previously marginalized individuals and communities.
A migration from authoritative sources to social media

The Internet also changed where people go to find news and general information.

There has been a steady migration away from traditional resources toward content delivered via web search engines and social media.
The source of information becomes blurred

As web search engines and social media became the primary ‘go-to’ source for news and general information, the public has become less conscious of the origin of information, who creates it, and whether it is trustworthy.
A paradox of the Information Age is that while we have access to many more and diverse information sources, it is getting harder to distinguish fact from opinion and truth from lies.
Personalised search loved by consumers

Search engines and social media act as information filters. Filters have become essential as we sort and sift through vast amounts of information. Search has also become personalised: filters now evaluate both what we look at and the person who is looking.

A search for ‘movies’ won’t just retrieve cinema listings, it will filter by what’s on at the closest cinema to where you are now. A search for products will remember and filter by all your past searches and purchases.
Unintended consequences for factual searches

Over the past decade personalised search has spread from the world of online shopping to become an inherent design feature in all major search engines and social media websites.

What worked well for shopping becomes problematic when applied to how we search for factual information.
Filter bubbles of confirmation bias

Personalised search can distort our view of reality, creating a personal *filter bubble* that reinforces our existing beliefs while limiting our exposure to new ideas and contrary viewpoints.
Filters exert subliminal influence

Personalised search operates imperceptibly and without our conscious consent. Its influence is effectively subliminal: we have little awareness of and even less control over the data that is collected about us and how it is used to filter our access to information.
Filters now for sale enabling micro-targeted messaging

Conversely, advertisers can pay to use this data to influence the information that we retrieve.

Political campaign managers in the USA and UK described micro-targeted messaging via social media as decisive in recent elections.
Propaganda is an inevitable part of democratic discourse

Propaganda is persuasively presented information, whether false or true, that is intended to influence people’s beliefs and behaviour.

Propaganda has negative connotations, but it is nevertheless a manifestation of free speech and democratic discourse.
Cyber-propaganda distorts human democratic discourse

Cyber-propaganda presents new problems, such as ‘socialbots’, which automatically generate thousands of artificial messages in support of or opposition to candidates and causes.

They distort human democratic discourse and have influenced recent elections.
Democracy relies on a well informed public
## Unpacking Post-Truth

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<th>Dubitable Information</th>
<th>False Information</th>
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<td><strong>Trends</strong></td>
<td>Migration away from professional publications and libraries to search engines and social media as ‘primary’ sources of variable quality.</td>
<td>Devaluation of facts, evidence and rational argument in political discourse.</td>
<td>Massive increase in political advertising spent on search engines and social media, especially micro-targeted messaging.</td>
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<td>Increasing technical sophistication of state-sponsored propaganda.</td>
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The problem of state-sponsored propaganda
State-sponsored propaganda

January 2017 ODNI Report

- ‘a Russian messaging strategy [was developed] that blends covert intelligence operations—such as cyber activity—with overt efforts by Russian Government agencies, state-funded media, third-party intermediaries, and paid social media users or “trolls.”’

- ‘We assess Moscow will apply lessons learned from its Putin-ordered campaign aimed at the US presidential election to future influence efforts worldwide, including against US allies and their election processes.’

- ‘the Russian Government aspired to help President-elect Trump’s election chances when possible by discrediting Secretary Clinton’; and that

The problem of personalised search
The filter bubble – example

https://blog.nus.edu.sg/is1103grp203/2013/03/31/personalized-search-and-its-discontents-ii/
The filter bubble – example

https://blog.nus.edu.sg/is1103grp203/2013/03/31/personalized-search-and-its-discontents-ii/
'Left to their own devices, personalisation filters serve up a kind of autopropaganda, indoctrinating us with our own ideas, amplifying our desire for things that are familiar... In the filter bubble, there's less room for the chance encounters that bring insight and learning... the collision of ideas from different disciplines and cultures'.

Eli Pariser, 2012

'For too many of us, it’s become safer to retreat into our own bubbles, whether in our neighborhoods or college campuses or places of worship or our social media feeds, surrounded by people who look like us and share the same political outlook and never challenge our assumptions. The rise of naked partisanship, increasing economic and regional stratification, the splintering of our media into a channel for every taste... we become so secure in our bubbles that we accept only information, whether true or not, that fits our opinions, instead of basing our opinions on the evidence that’s out there.'

President Barack Obama, 2017

The problem of political search
Online political advertising on path to overtake broadcast media

How campaign ads went digital

Candidates are now targeting Facebook users on their phones, with US online political spending expected to pass $1bn this year. By 2020, digital could be within 30% of TV

Spending on political advertising

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Digital</th>
<th>Broadcast TV</th>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
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<td>2016</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
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Source: Borrell Associates

Guardian graphic

Politicians wooed by search and social media companies

Google’s political services

[Image of Google’s political services]

https://www.google.com/ads/elections/

Facebook’s political services

[Image of Facebook’s political services]

https://politics.fb.com/ad-campaigns/
Interviewed for BBC Panorama Gary Coby of the Republican National Committee described how Facebook’s *micro-targeted campaign messaging was ‘decisive’* in the 2016 election.

Speaking about micro-targeted messaging on the same programme Gerry Gunster, Campaign Strategist for Leave EU, said ‘I think Facebook was a game-changer for the campaign… I can send a specific message through Facebook to them that no one else is seeing’.

BBC Panorama programme *What Facebook Knows About You*, first broadcast May 8th, 2017

The problem of computational propaganda
‘With every new technology comes abuse, and social media is no exception. A second category of social bots includes malicious entities designed specifically with the purpose to harm. These bots mislead, exploit, and manipulate social media discourse with rumors, spam, malware, misinformation, slander, or even just noise. This may result in several levels of damage to society. For example, bots may artificially inflate support for a political candidate; such activity could endanger democracy by influencing the outcome of elections.’

https://cacm.acm.org/magazines/2016/7/204021-the-rise-of-social-bots/fulltext
‘The Computational Propaganda Research Project (COMPROP) investigates the interaction of algorithms, automation and politics. This work includes analysis of how tools like social media bots are used to manipulate public opinion by amplifying or repressing political content, disinformation, hate speech, and junk news.’

http://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/
The problem of information literacy
Migration away from professional publications and libraries to online and social media sources of variable quality.

'34% of adults had used a public library service in the 12 months before being interviewed [in 2015]. This is a statistically significant decrease [14%] since data collection began in 2005/06...' Changing patterns of library use, Libraries Taskforce, UK Dept. For Culture, Media & Sport, May 10, 2016: https://librariestaskforce.blog.gov.uk/2016/05/10/changing-patterns-of-library-use/

Counter evidence challenges the idea that library use is in decline. Most Americans – especially Millennials – say libraries can help them find reliable, trustworthy information http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/30/most-americans-especially-millennials-say-libraries-can-help-them-find-reliable-trustworthy-information/

Dubitable information – trends

Growth in use of social media for news
% of users of each social networking site who get news there

Need for impartial information during elections

September 2016 ERS Article on the EU Referendum:

- ‘glaring democratic deficiencies’
- ‘people felt they were ill-informed about the issues’
- ‘misleading [campaign] claims could be made with impunity’
- Need for ‘a minimum data set or impartial information guide’
- Need for tools ‘for members of public to host own debates’
- Need to make media coverage ‘more deliberative than combative/binary.’
Counter Scientific Thinking

Friends of Science takes a position that humans are largely not responsible for the currently observed global warming, contrary to the established scientific position on the subject. They are considered by many to promote climate change denial. They are largely funded by the fossil fuel industry.

Agnotology
the study of culturally induced ignorance or doubt, particularly the publication of inaccurate or misleading scientific data.


https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agnotology

https://friendsofscience.org/
Initiatives
(some among many)
March for Science rallies held worldwide in 2017

In 2017 more than **1.3 million people in more than 600 cities** around the world marched to defend the role of science in policy and society.

https://www.marchforscience.com/

**Washington DC**, April 22

**London**, April 22

**Deli**, August 9
Facts matter

Take a stand: #FactsMatter

Our Facts Matter campaign champions the value of quality information and evidence for learning, to our economy, to health and healthcare, in democracy and for equal, inclusive communities.

We’re asking the library, information and knowledge to take a stand with us to show that #FactsMatter.

Download our postcard and a supporter board below and share your support!

If you are attending CILIP Conference 2017 in Manchester, please come and see us on the CILIP stand, where we’d love you to join in and take an action to support #FactsMatter.

Facts Matter and the 2017 General Election

With an urgent need for reliable information and evidence in political debate and democratic decision-making, in the run up to the 2017 General Election CILIP and our members asked political parties and candidates to endorse the vital role of facts and evidence in public life.

https://www.cilip.org.uk/advocacy-awards/advocacy-campaigns/facts-matter
Wiki Tribune – Evidence Based Volunteer Journalism

Why?
The news is broken and we can fix it.

The news is broken and we can fix it. We’re bringing genuine community control to our news with unrestricted access for all. We’re developing a living, breathing tool that’ll present accurate information with real evidence, so that you can confidently make up your own mind.

https://www.wikitribune.com

Jimmy Wales
Founder of Wikipedia in 2001
Founder of WikiTRIBUNE in 2017
Google and Facebook supporting fake news initiatives

Fact Check now available in Google Search and News around the world

https://www.blog.google/products/search/fact-check-now-available-google-search-and-news-around-world/

'Disputed by multiple fact-checkers': Facebook rolls out new alert to combat fake news

How can big data analytics and graphs help us to understand the problem

Quantifying and Bursting the Online Filter Bubble
February 2017

Kiran Garimella
PhD Student
Kings College London

https://www.slideshare.net/KiranGarimella1/quantifying-and-bursting-the-online-filter-bubble
How can the KO community help
Starter Ideas

- Big data analytics
- Adoption of journalistic standards
- Automated fake news detection
- Public debate forums
- Automated provenance detection
- Trusted source certification
- Information literacy programmes
- Fact checking projects
- Regulation of online political advertising
- Socialbot blockers
- Personalised search opt-out for facts & news
- Analysis & awareness projects
- Relevancy search standards
The biggest problem isn’t being addressed
How search methodologies have changed

**Relevancy**
- content is ranked by its relevance to the question
- Based on library science.
- Aims for the objective retrieval of content based on the best match to the meaning of the question.

**Popularity**
- content is ranked by its popularity and connections
- Underpins most search engines and social media.
- While not biased by subject, it limits exposure to new or outlier content.

**Personality**
- content is ranked by personal profiles about the searcher
- A successful model for shopping preferences.
- Its self-referential design reinforces biases and limits access to new ideas.

**Publicity**
- content is ranked by the interests of paying advertisers
- Accepted within the market of products and services,
- Problematic when applied to news and factual content.
Should facts be for sale?

When a user requests factual information, should search providers filter the results based on the interests of a paying third-party?

Is this a technical, regulatory or standards issue, or all of the above? Should the KO community champion best practice guidelines?
Should facts be personalised?

When a user requests factual information, should search providers automatically filter the results based on personal profile data?

Some people may prefer not to see balanced information... what should be the default behaviour? Should opt-in /out filters be supported?
Developing a Post-Truth Knowledge Organization System

- Glossary of post-truth terms
- Faceted classification of
  - Causes
  - Effects
  - Solutions
- Resource References
  - Books
  - Blogs
  - Websites
  - Videos
Call to action

Let us work together to build a society that is open-minded, fact-loving and search savvy.

Let us hold our leaders, businesses and institutions accountable to promote and protect truthfulness as a core value.
The Beginning!