Truth in an Age of Information

Alan Dix

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@alanjohndix
today I am not talking about ...

• deep digitality and digital thinking
• next generation UX tools
• long tail of small data
• intelligent interfaces
• physicality
• now
• digital light
• walking round Wales
• virtual crackers and slow time
• digital humanities and community heritage
• modeling dreams, regret and the emergence of self
UNDERSTANDING DESIGN IN A PHYSICAL–DIGITAL WORLD

TOUCH IT

ALAN DIX
STEVE GILL
JO HARE
DEVINA RAMDUNY-Ellis
P.S.

Alan’s on the road again ...
Truth in an Age of Information

bad actors and good actors
... and those in the middle

fighting back
doing better
falsehood flies,
and
truth comes limping after it

Jonathan Swift
The Examiner No. 14, Thursday, 9th November 1710
Trump’s Suggestion That Disinfectants Could Be Used to Treat Coronavirus Prompts Aggressive Pushback

Responding to the criticism from public health officials around the country, the president said he was playing a trick on reporters.

Here's What We Know So Far About Russia's 2016 Meddling
violence and assassination
crucial issues
growing inequality
future pandemics
climate change and water crises
a B-movie cast
intrinsically bad people, states, or media
... or just those on the ‘other’ side?

bad methods and/or bad information
inc. misinformation and hateful or violent content

sometimes tell the truth!
bad reasons — twisting facts, Astroturfing
maybe not not all bad
BSE (mad cow disease) ... no problem
good actors

don’t always tell the truth ...

deliberate
  – eg. war time ... Glasgow blitz

accidental ....
What was wrong with the claim that the UK sends the EU £350m a week?

The claim that Britain “sends the EU £350m a week” is wrong because:

- The rebate negotiated by Margaret Thatcher is removed before anything is paid to Brussels. In 2014, this meant Britain actually “sent” £276m a week to Brussels; in 2016, the figure was £252m.
- Slightly less than half that sum - the money that Britain does send to the EU - either comes back to the UK to be spent mainly on agriculture, regional aid, research and community projects, or gets counted towards the country’s international aid target.

poor numeracy   ... e.g. Greenland ice
hard to notice flaws when you agree
... academic papers?
outcomes ...

mistakes – e.g. £350 million
spinning – selection, quote marks
emphasis – headlines vs. last paragraph
subtle language – passive vs active
images – misleading placement, cropping

sometimes deliberate
often simply human bias
I worry most about poor arguments from those with whom I agree.

loss of moral force

easy to refute

loss of confidence in media
life is maybe more like a Clint Eastwood movie
an ecology of (mis)information

producers
information
consumers

our side
true
ignore

other side
slanted
choose the convenient

really bad
false
excuse

play “swop the politician”
feedback effects

downward spiral exacerbated by internet

needs audience reaction

simplified messages

wants instant meaning
two paths

fighting back

doing better
two paths

fighting back

doing better
echo chambers and filter bubbles

lots of work
  – network visualisations of information flows
  – counter-views ... tend not to work if too counter

the ecology
  – media – preaching to the converted
  – public – idea that search is neutral

being liberal?
argumentation

fact checking sites
  – out of context, misinterpreted
  – state interpretation, show full source
  – checking data ... “beyond my pay grade”

teaching rhetoric?
  – debating classes, flipping sides
  – academic papers too!

argumentation systems
  – gIBIS, QOC, Deb8
data and provenance

quotes and context

Snip!t

“the camera never lies” (late 19\textsuperscript{th} C)

Four Corners

make it easy!

1970s file systems, Word and PPT
It is an outlet of the Greenland ice cap. Over 35,000 cu... calve from the glacier each year, and more icebergs spew... than anywhere else in the northern hemisphere.

Climate change: Greenland's culture shifts as Arctic heats up – BBC News

Tour boat skipper George Jonathansen skilfully weaves around these giants. Even young people like him have seen change within their lifetimes.

"When I was a kid, the weather was more predictable. Nowadays... we never know how the winter is going to be," he says.

"I think this year has been unusual compared to the others." This summer was cold, he says, "A lot of places in Greenland have record rain."

When asked about climate change, Palle Jerimiassen, the local mayor of Avannaata district says: "We can feel it everyday. We can see it everyday."
data and provenance

quotes and context

"the camera never lies" (late 19th C)

Four Corners

make it easy!

1970s file systems, Word and PPT
It was about 4 a.m. and roughly 20 minutes after the first shooting. When the first shooting occurred I was two blocks away and people scattered. Police barricades were stomped. When the second shooting occurred I was on the corner of Franklin and Empire, half a block away. The gunshot was a light pop and sounded almost like a firecracker. A few peo-
data and provenance

quotes and context

Snip!t

“the camera never lies” (late 19th C)

Four Corners

make it easy!

1970s file systems, Word and PPT
numerical data

numeric data and innumeracy
  – more BBC – 35,000 m³ vs 35 km³

qualitative–quantitative reasoning
  – iVolver
  – worksheets
Climate change: Greenland's culture shifts as Arctic heats up

All of this ice is missing now," Flemming says as he points to a map of the Sermeq Kujalleq or Jakobshavn glacier.

It is an outlet of the Greenland ice cap. Over 35,000 cubic metres of ice calve from the glacier each year, and more icebergs spew into Disko Bay than anywhere else in the northern hemisphere.
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numeric data

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qualitative–quantitative reasoning
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  – worksheets
WS2 (worksheets)

- minimum wage at 37 hour week; currently £16,777.28 * (source ACAS)
- median wage; currently £30,800 * (source ONS)
- top of basic rate tax; currently £50,000 * (source GOV.UK)
- high earner £100,000 – top 3% of tax payers (source GOV.UK)

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extratax:
additional tax due to higher rates

= 2500

= income* tax_inc/100

income = 50,000

tax_inc = 5
call to action

tools and methods
for press
for public
for politicians
...
and academics too!
Truth in an Age of Information
we can make a difference

Alan Dix
https://alandix.com/academic/talks/CHIRA2022-keynote/