

Archives and Fake News: Trust Reconstruction in the “Post-Truth” Era

Jingyi Zeng¹[0000-0002-8870-4576], Yongjun Xu¹[0000-0002-1180-7358], and Li Niu¹[0000-0002-9976-6633]

¹ School of Information Resource Management, Renmin University of China, Beijing, 100872, China

ruczengjingyi@gmail.com; xyj@ruc.edu.cn; rucniuli@ruc.edu.cn

Abstract. The Purpose of this paper is to establish the mechanism of archives in the Trust Reconstruction in the “post-truth” era. Through literature research, it is supposed to do some further analysis on the issues of archives, fake news, and trust. This paper may also take the external environment, technology, policy and other factors into account. Study found that fake news continuously erodes objective facts and makes us lose independent thinking, which is bad for our well-being. Archives can reconstruct trust through two ways, one is archival management, the other is Big Archival Data.

Keywords: Archives, Trust, Fake News, Fact-check, Trust Reconstruction.

1 Introduction

Post-truth is an adjective defined as ‘relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief[1]. “Trust” is slowly eroded in the “post-truth” era. As *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019* [2] shows, across all countries, the average level of trust in the news in general is down 2 percentage points to 42% and less than half (49%) agree that they trust the news media they themselves use. In Brazil 85% agree with a statement that they are worried about what is real and fake on the Internet. In fact, Fake news has been the focus of the report for nearly five years.

In China, WeChat is a popular new media. According to its Data Report (2018)[3], more than 1 billion people are active every month, including overseas users. However, recently, WeChat has been involved in some whirlpools because of fake news. In May, 2019, SBS news reported that the Australian labor party had sent a letter to Tencent, reflecting that some articles against the labor party appeared on WeChat and were spreading “fake news” about the labor party, which poses a challenge to the regulation of WeChat and online fundraising platforms obviously, as well as a challenge to rebuild social trust in the “post - truth” era.

Research has found that libraries are already taking in action, exploring the role of libraries in the fight against fake news, discussing the history, scope and impact of fake news and the tools available for correcting misinformation[4]. However, for archivists and archival institutions were seen as neutral and objective third parties that could be trusted to protect records and not tamper with them[5], there is a lack of studies on the archives and trust, as well as fake news. Through literature research, this paper is attempting to explore the role of archives in the fight against fake news, proposes a theoretical framework, argues that archives can take responsibility for reinforcing context and transparency to realize the governance of fake news through archival management and big archival data in the “post-truth” era.

2 Fake News: Crisis of Trust

The volume of articles in academic journals or magazines, special edited issues and volumes, conferences, webinars, opinion pieces, newsletters, blog posts, and official statements—all pertaining to fake news, misinformation, post-truth, post-facts, and so on[6] is blowing up in the last five years, marked by the 2016 U.S. election. Given these adjectives such as fake, mis-, post and nouns such as truth, facts, the shadow about fake news suddenly jumped on the paper, indicating the crisis of trust.

The crisis of trust caused by fake news further impairs our ability to think, affecting our wellbeing by digital distrust. On the one hand, facts are mixed with opinions, causing the source itself to appear the authenticity crisis. On the other hand, filtered information leads to a cocoon of information, what we know is what others want us to know.

Are objective facts ineffective? This paper argues that there is not a problematic fact, the problem lies in the fact-check mechanism. However, a full fact-check should conclude claim, counterclaim, evidence, judgement [7]. In the third part, this paper explores the feasibility and path of how to do fact-check by Archives.

3 Trust Reconstruction: Archives' Response

3.1 Two Ways for Trust Reconstruction

Context is Everything [8]. For a long time, archives as a kind of evidence actually shows that people trust archives. In the past, trust in archival records was said to be reinforced by trust in archivists and in the institutions where archives were kept [9]. It falls to Archives to act on the same role in the digital age. Thus, it is feasible to reconstruct trust through archival management, which oriented toward a wider range of digital materials. Provenance provides a critical foundation for assessing authenticity, enabling trust, and trust is derived from provenance information, and typically is a subjective judgment that depends on context and use [10]. By adopting the principles and standard specification of archives to restrict the provenance, control the front end and manage the whole process, capturing the context, detect the four attributes, authenticity would be ensured and trust would be secured.

Transparency is the New Objectivity [11]. At present, a lot of research work and efforts have been focused on building online fact-check systems. However, for such systems, a key issue is data, adequate, detailed and accurate data. Where does these data come from? The opportunity of archives in digital age is to shift the basis of trust, from the authority of the archive as an institution to transparency of archival practice[12]. Thus big archival data with a single type of high value characteristics is the most reliable alternatives. Capture, store, and mine these data can provide fact-based predictions of the future to the public, as well as rendering things as they are.

3.2 A Theoretical Framework was Established

As shown in Fig. 1, the framework is divided into two parts. the left is the trust reconstruction mechanism, and the right is the instance. While reconstructing trust in archives, external factors such as policy, technology and cooperation need to be considered in order to maximize benefits for fighting against fake news.

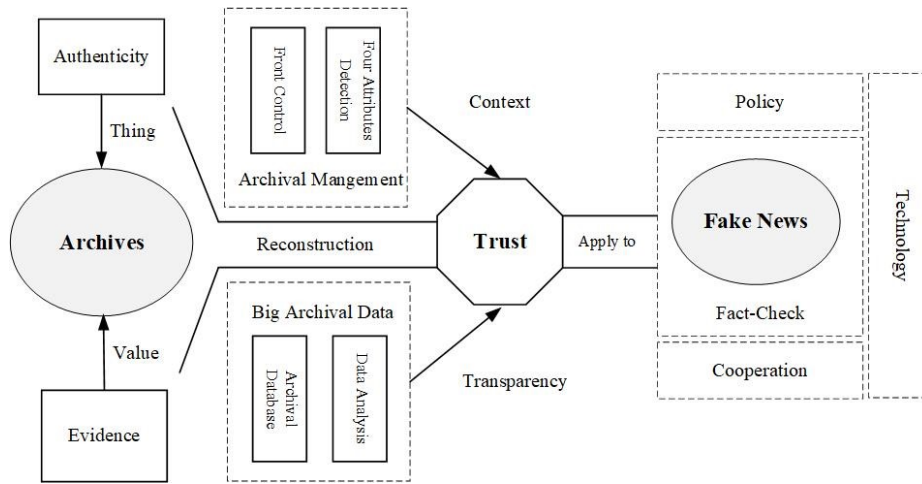


Fig. 1. A theoretical framework of this paper

4 Conclusion

In fact, many popular medias such as Google and YouTube have been taking in action, for example, providing a way to find the source of a picture or video. Many countries also promote legislation, too. In view of the roles Archives bearing on trust reconstruction in the “post-truth” era, there should be more supporting policies. Archives is expected to work together with libraries, data departments and regulatory departments to develop a broader circle of cooperation. Technology is a key tool. As the John Sheridan said, who is the digital director of The National Archives, the digital archivist, equipped with hashing algorithms and cryptography as their tools of the trade, can remain trusted custodians in this digital future[13].

References

1. Word of the Year 2016, <https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2016/>, last accessed 2019/12/15.
2. Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019, https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/inline-files/DNR_2019_FINAL.pdf, last accessed 2019/09/20.
3. 2018 WeChat Data Report, <https://support.weixin.qq.com/cgi-bin/mmsupport-bin/get-opendays>, last accessed 2019/09/20.

4. Batchelor, O. Getting out the truth: the role of libraries in the fight against fake news. *Reference Services Review*, 45(2), 143–148 (2017).
5. Gilliland A, Neutrality, Social Justice and the Obligations of Archival Education and Educators in the Twenty-first Century. *Archival Science* 11, no. 3-4: 193–209(2011).
6. Sullivan, M.C. Libraries and fake news: What’s the problem? What’s the plan? *Communications in Information Literacy*, 13(1), 91-113 (2019).
7. Coddington, M., Molyneux, L., & Lawrence, R. G. Fact checking the campaign how political reporters use Twitter to set the record straight (or not). *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 19(4), 391-409(2014).
8. Gouldner A. *Wildcat strike: a study in worker– management relationships*. London: Routledge; 1955.
9. Yeo G. Trust and context in cyberspace, *Archives and Records*,34:2, 214-234 (2013).
10. What Is Provenance. https://www.w3.org/2005/Incubator/prov/wiki/What_Is_Provenance, last accessed 2019/12/15.
11. Transparency is the new objectivity. <https://www.hyperorg.com/blogger/2009/07/19/transparency-is-the-new-objectivity/>, last accessed 2019/12/15.
12. Archives Unlocked-Trust in the digital future. <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/Archives-Unlocked-Accessibility-Version.pdf>, last accessed 2019/12/15.
13. Archives Unlocked-Trust in the digital future. <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/Archives-Unlocked-Accessibility-Version.pdf>, last accessed 2019/12/15.