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Fact-checking Viral Trends For News Writers

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CHAPTER TWELVE

FACT-CHECKING VIRAL TRENDS FOR NEWS WRITERS

Elizabeth M. Downey, Mississippi State University

ABSTRACT

Social media is a constant in day-to-day life and is often the first place news breaks. However, the likelihood of false information being spread across social media is high, and this can affect journalists trying to do their jobs, in both gathering information and trying to achieve balance. Reporters and news writers need to be able to quickly evaluate the legitimacy of social media sources for information, especially viral posts, lest they be accused of spreading "fake news." This chapter examines how social media has disrupted traditional news reporting and caused media outlets to tackle the audience's opinion of them as "fake news." I then explain how posts go "viral," particularly on Twitter, and what actually causes topics to trend on the platform. To close, there are practical methods students can use to evaluate and fact-check both Twitter accounts and individual tweets. Through the materials in this chapter, student news writers will be armed with the knowledge to evaluate social media posts for veracity, with a concluding learning activity that puts these skills into practice.

Introduction

Twitter as the New "Breaking News"

In today's information cycle, social media is often the proverbial "step one" in the process of news gathering and dissemination.[1] A news event occurs, a person with a smartphone takes video of the scene, and they post it to Twitter. Examples of tweets being the first to report news include video taken by a spectator of the initial explosion at the finish line of

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the Boston Marathon in 2013,[2] traffic at a standstill in front of Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, as students texted news of a mass shooter,[3] and footage a mile away from a 2019 explosion at a chemical plant in Port Neches, Texas.[4] In all of these examples, followers retweet the post, which is then picked up by their followers, and the post goes viral. As the post spreads, other modes of engagement happen. Some users will click the heart icon to "like" the post, and others reply with some variation of "wow!" or "not real dude." Hashtags appear that are linked to the event. Soon, another type of reply shows up below the original post:

> Hi! Did you take this? I'm [media person] with [big-time media organization]! May we use this in all of our platforms with your permission?

But by then, the news has been read by millions before mainstream media outlets could even fact-check them for accuracy.

The conventional print and broadcast media have traditionally served as a gatekeeper in the gathering and distribution of information. Social media, however, has blown up the gates; reporters working in newsrooms have had to pivot their skills as they deal with social media users breaking news before they have the chance to check facts and filter out rumors and misinformation. Inevitably, in the scuffle to be the first to report on a news story, accuracy is sacrificed for speed. Misinformation is spread that is later shown to be false, and the accusations of "fake news!" fly.[5]

Most information literacy instruction on fake news tends to focus on the content consumer, asking the typical Facebook or Twitter user to critically evaluate information and be aware of their biases as an audience member. Pivoting this instruction to news writers, particularly students in a journalism and news writing class, how does fake news affect them? Specifically, how has social media contributed to both the news-gathering process and the perception of "fake news" as more of the media's problem? In this chapter, I first look at how social media has affected and changed today's newsrooms, the role of professional objectivity versus scientific objectivity, and how these issues factor into teaching news-reporting students to be aware of their own biases. Then I examine how and why social media posts become viral, how Twitter measures engagement, and why virality does not always mean veracity. Finally, I introduce simple methods to evaluate social media posts and accounts before using them as sources.

Social Media's Effect on Traditional Journalism

The news-gathering industry has always (though sometimes begrudgingly) adapted to new technologies, from the telegraph to television, based on how well the technology fits in with the journalistic mission; Twitter and other social media are simply an extension of this. Everett Rogers's diffusion of innovations theory is a good way to explain how the media industry adapts. The theory posits that four factors play a role: "nature of the innovation… the influence of the social system… the communication channels used… [and] time required for the innovation to be adopted."[6] Twitter is a way for audiences to participate in the spread of news stories, and editors, publishers, and media CEOs pay attention; engagement with stories can determine what types of stories get attention, and that is sent to marketing and advertising departments. Twitter is increasingly used by reporters to break news, to find story tips, and help media serve its gatekeeping function by debunking erroneous information.[7] Twitter's earliest adopters in the newsroom were reporters in the "millennial" age cohort, those born in the early 1980s to early 1990s.[8] Traditional sources of news have made Twitter part of their public relations as well. Before social media, a crime reporter would follow the police scanners; now the police departments have their own Twitter accounts.[9]

While Twitter has disrupted the traditional news cycle by giving power to the "citizen journalist," it has also enabled smaller news organizations to break news with the same speed and reach as larger media conglomerates.[10] In November 2019, the Emmett Till Interpretive Center tweeted security camera footage from the more recently installed memorial marker to the fourteen-year-old murdered in Money, Mississippi, in 1955.[11] A few hours later, the *Jackson Free Press*, a small independent newspaper based in Mississippi's state capital was the first media outlet to do a full report on the incident, that of a white supremacist group attempting to tape a propaganda message in front of the marker.[12] The reporter linked the story on his Twitter account and included the Interpretive Center's camera footage, showing the group running from the marker as warning sirens sounded. Pittman tagged both the paper's Twitter account, @jxnfreepress, and the Center, amplifying the story to other outlets and bringing new followers and donors to the Center.[13]

As news organizations have adopted Twitter, they have also adopted the problems that come with it, particularly the spread of misinformation. Journalists are not immune to being tricked by "fake news." Researchers from the Institute for the Future, in a recent study of over one thousand journalists, found that more than 80 percent of them conceded to being fooled by misinformation on the internet.[14] More concerning, according to an article on the study, "only 14.9% of journalists surveyed said they had been trained on how to best report on misinformation" and "more than half of journalists said it could be harmful to report on misinformation at all."[15]

The reluctance to report on misinformation or fake news can be explained by the struggle that reporters have between the concepts of professional objectivity and scientific objectivity. Journalism generally operates under the rule of *professional objectivity*, where both sides of a story are equally represented and it is left up to the viewer or reader to determine what side to fall on. This is done in order to appear unbiased; reporters are taught to be neutral and to deliver balanced stories. *Scientific objectivity* differs from this greatly in that it uses the scientific method to find an answer, which inevitably means one side is right and one is wrong.[16] Reporters unfamiliar with trolling tactics may amplify extremist voices in a misguided attempt to appear fair and balanced.[17] The use of the "Pepe the Frog" meme in the 2016 election is an example of this. When Donald Trump, Jr. retweeted an image using the meme, mainstream media outlets reported on it, amplifying the voice of the alt-right but also attributing the title of "troll" to everyone from Richard Spencer and outlets such as Breitbart and Infowars to even then-Republican candidate Donald Trump. By giving oxygen to the meme, alt-right figures had a built-in excuse; by extending more credit to "trolls" for turning the election, the overuse of the term shifted the Overton Window—i.e., "the norms of acceptable public discourse."[18] The good news is that reporters *want* to learn; studies show a majority want "training on how to report on false information and… tools to help them detect bots and other misinformation tools on social media."[19] Starting in the undergraduate journalism classroom, we can start training students with fact-checking methods particular to social media. A short presentation highlighting these methods, followed with an activity that puts those methods to practice like the one at the end of this chapter, can be a hands-on way to engage them in this professional skill. Let us begin with a news story from 2019 that probably got a little more traction than it should have.

What Makes Posts Go Viral?

The Case of #NotMyAriel: When Trolls Trend

In July 2019, Disney announced that they would be casting Halle Bailey (of the R&B vocal duo Chloe x Halle and the Freeform show *grown-ish*) as Ariel, the lead character in the live-action remake of *The Little Mermaid*.[20] Bailey is African American, while the character in the original animation was white with red hair. While the news was met mostly with enthusiasm on social media, there was some dissension, particularly from Disney "purists" who felt the actress should match the animation, as had happened with previous live remakes of *Cinderella* and *Beauty and the Beast*. Soon, the hashtag #NotMyAriel was trending and news outlets picked up on the story, bringing more attention to the comparatively fewer negative reactions and making the controversy seem more like an even pro/con split. Outlets including the *Washington Post* (in three stories alone) published stories on the issue of race in the casting.[21] One viral tweet stood out, oddly not even attached to the hashtag; a user named "Rebeccs" with the username @woo-ahhh posted:

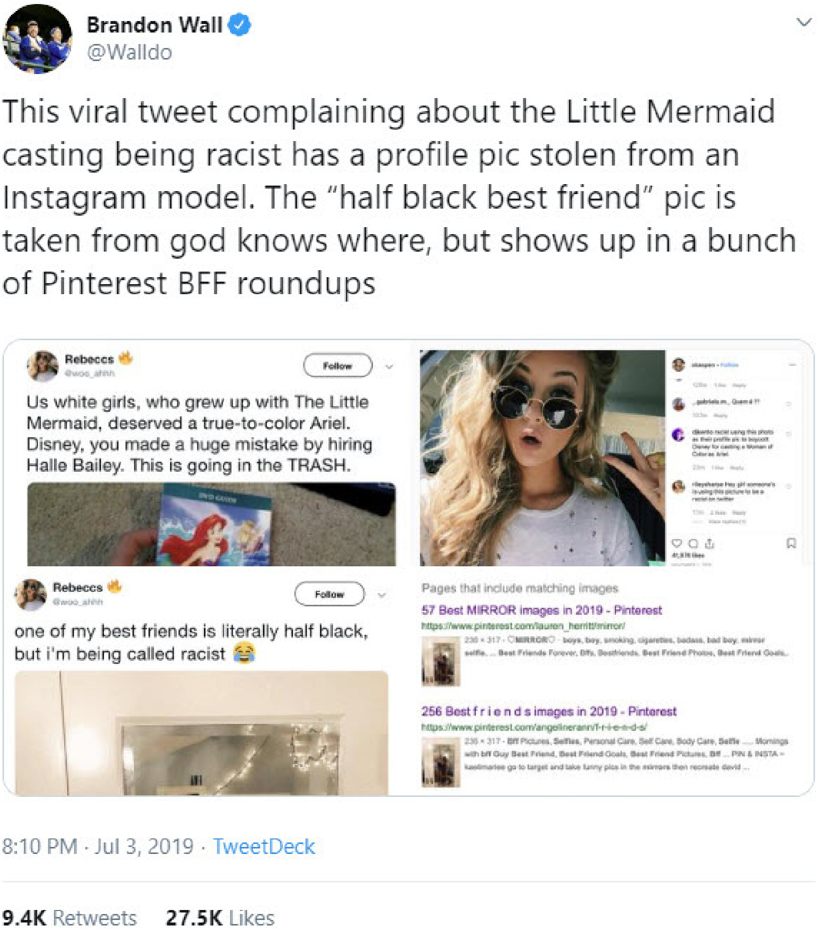
> Us white girls, who grew up with The Little Mermaid, deserved a true-to-color Ariel. Disney, you made a huge mistake by hiring Halle Bailey. This is going in the TRASH.[22]

The tweet was accompanied by the image of a DVD booklet for the original animated movie, and the profile picture was of someone young, thin, white, and blonde. When the tweet was met with backlash, the user responded with another picture, this time with another girl accompanied by the text:

> one of my friends is literally half-black, but i'm being called racist [crying laughing emoji][23]

Twitter accounts and news outlets pointed to this as an example of the backlash. Brandon Wall of Buzzfeed News investigated the tweet and discovered that it was not legitimate:

- The profile picture was stolen from an Instagram model named Aspen Mansfield (username: @okaspen) who was alerted to her photo being used.
- The image they used for the "best friend is half-black" tweet appears in several Pinterest "BFF" (best friend forever) searches.
- The image of the DVD "special features" booklet in the original tweet was actually a screenshot stolen from an unboxing video on YouTube.[24]



Brandon Wall @Walldo

This viral tweet complaining about the Little Mermaid casting being racist has a profile pic stolen from an Instagram model. The "half black best friend" pic is taken from god knows where, but shows up in a bunch of Pinterest BFF roundups

Rebeccs @woo_ahhh

Us white girls, who grew up with The Little Mermaid, deserved a true-to-color Ariel. Disney, you made a huge mistake by hiring Halle Bailey. This is going in the TRASH.

Rebeccs @woo_ahhh

one of my best friends is literally half black, but i'm being called racist 😂

Pages that include matching images

57 Best MIRROR images in 2019 - Pinterest
https://www.pinterest.com/lauren_herritt/mirror/
236 × 317 · ♡MIRROR♡ · boys, boy, smoking, cigarettes, badass, bad boy, mirror selfie, ... Best Friends Forever, Bffs, Bestfriends, Best Friend Photos, Best Friend Goals...

256 Best f r i e n d s images in 2019 - Pinterest
https://www.pinterest.com/angelineranr/f-r-i-e-n-d-s/
236 × 317 · Bff Pictures, Selfies, Personal Care, Self Care, Body Care, Selfie ..... Mornings with bff Guy Best Friend, Best Friend Goals, Best Friend Pictures, Bff ... PIN & INSTA ~ kaeilmariee go to target and take funny pics in the mirrors then recreate david ...

8:10 PM · Jul 3, 2019 · TweetDeck

9.4K Retweets **27.5K** Likes

Figure 12.1.
Image of Brandon Wall's (@walldo) tweet, dissecting @woo_ahhh's viral post about *The Little Mermaid* casting (Reproduced with permission from Brandon Wall).

While some of the racist backlash was real (most complained about "authenticity"), it appears much of the buzz was due to the trending of the hashtag #NotMyAriel. Accompanied in the same trending feed by the derogatory term "colored," followers and media made assumptions overblowing the backlash. As @itsdanusername tweeted, much of the trend happened "because of people complaining about it being on trending."[25]

Other outlets did eventually respond that #NotMyAriel created "faux outrage" and that the amount of actual negative response to the casting was minimal, but several months later, the top headlines in recent Google searches for the hashtag still focus on the racist backlash to casting. So how did #NotMyAriel actually trend and, by extension, how do Twitter trends happen? How can students replicate the type of investigation Brandon Wall did in an activity to evaluate other news-making tweets?

Impressions, Engagement, and Algorithms (oh my!)

It helps to understand the data that Twitter counts and collects. Twitter Analytics measures two different overall metrics: impressions and engagement. *Impressions* is a measurement of the reach of your tweet based on the combined number of times your tweet appears in the search results and in other user feeds. Essentially, your impressions can grow based on your follower count but also if your followers retweet you (so that now your tweet appears in the feeds of anyone you share a follower with, even if you do not mutually follow each other). *Engagement* measures actual *interactions* with a tweet; this includes replies, retweets, likes, and clicks (meaning a user clicked on anything related to your tweet, including your profile, a hashtag, a link, or an embedded image).[26] Twitter's algorithm counts *all* engagement when scoring tweets for relevance, including both positive and negative interaction. One other factor to consider is the personalization of Twitter trends. "Trends for You" is a feature that can be turned on or off in Content Preferences, something to consider when using your own Twitter feed to check for trending news.[27] Now that we know engagement can amplify even an unpopular opinion, it is time to address something called "The Ratio."

You Just Got Ratio'ed (Yes, It's Now a Verb)

Going back to the "Not My Ariel" tweet, even if the account had been from a legitimate user, looking at the ratio is a strong clue about the popular opinion of the statement. According to the screenshot posted in Brandon Wall's investigation (the original tweet has since been pulled), the number of replies, retweets, and likes is indicative of an overwhelmingly negative response.[28] Compared to 289 retweets and 1,500 likes, there were more than 8,000 replies, most of them calling out the user for their racism. That adds up to a ratio of 4.5:1 of replies to retweets and likes. This is a phenomenon known as "being ratioed." To be ratioed on Twitter is generally not a positive; it means a tweet has upset enough users that they are compelled to let the account owner know just how upset they are.[29] A bad ratio is generally considered to be at least 2:1, or twice as many replies as combined retweets and likes. A ratio alone is not necessarily an indicator of a bad tweet all by itself; however, when a tweet is something creative or an opinion with which one agrees, Twitter has already provided the like and retweet functions. Replies are the method left to express dislike of the tweet author's take.[30] Even with a legitimate Twitter account, a trend does not lead to newsworthiness. Now let us return our focus back to the evaluation of less legitimate Twitter accounts.

Applying Fact-Checking to Social Media

The ability to fact-check is one of the most important tools a reporter can have to do their job, which is getting reliable information out to the public. Laura McClure explains that a fact-check should cover the classic "WWWWH" acronym: the answers to who, what, when, where, and how. They can include anything that can be checked in an actual record, including "names, numbers, dates, definitions, quotes, locations, research findings, historical events, statistics, survey and poll data, titles and authors, pronouns, financial data, institution names and spellings, and historical or biographical details attributed to anyone or anything."[31] Facts in the news-gathering process will generally come from either primary or secondary sources. Into which category do Twitter and other social media fall? The answer depends on the account and the tweet sent. Go back to the introduction and the examples of breaking news. The person who was at the Boston Marathon finish line certainly was a primary source as an eyewitness to the explosion. The driver stuck in traffic near Douglas High School that tweeted about the shooting is more nebulous; that may be considered more hearsay because they were not an eyewitness and therefore a secondary source. As for the person whose parent's Nest camera recorded the plant explosion in Texas, that could still be considered primary; someone else retweeting it with commentary, on the other hand, would not. But what if a few years go by and someone uses that plant explosion video to claim another incident, as ABC News did with another video accidentally in 2019?[32] This is when it is imperative to check the source that is tweeting the information. The following are methods to use in evaluating Twitter accounts and tweets. These are easily incorporated in a learning activity to give students the experience of fact-checking social media.

Detecting "Bot" Behavior on Twitter

Fake Twitter accounts come in a variety of guises. Some are very obvious parody/humor accounts, such as @BoredElonMusk or Not Mark Zuckerberg (@NotZuckerberg). Then there are "bots," artificial intelligence (AI) programmed to mimic a human Twitter user (or simply to be nonsensical, such as the Thin Lizzy tribute Twitter account @intownagain). Other accounts could be classified as "trolls," accounts operated by real people but used for malicious purposes, such as forcing topics and hashtags to trend, hijacking trends, spreading misinformation, and even "spoofing" legitimate accounts.[33] In some cases, a real account can be hacked, harming the reputation of its original owner by spreading falsehoods and rumors. So, what methods should a reporter—or anyone really—use to gauge the legitimacy of a Twitter account?

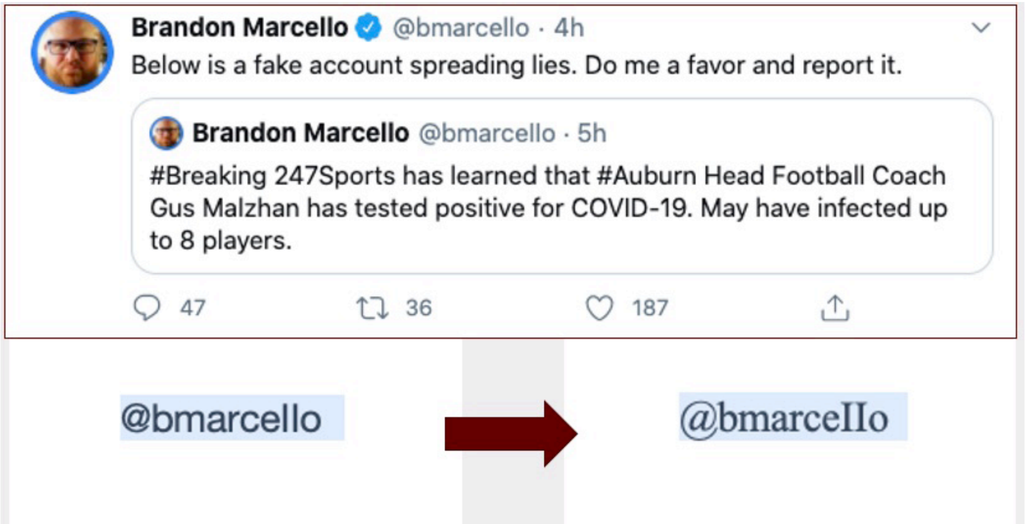
A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Likes

One obvious way is to check the profile photo, as Buzzfeed's Brandon Wall did. Does the user still have their default icon up, even though their profile has been live for a while? It should not take long to select a profile photo. If there is a photo, check the rest of their timeline to see if they use it in any other posts. Do a reverse image search in a tool such as Google Image Search or TinEye; if the photo is on other pages, are those operated by the same user? Someone may use the same image for their Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, or other accounts. If it is used by someone else or you see it across several accounts by multiple users, that is a sign of a bot.[34] Finally, not everyone wants to use their photo for privacy purposes, but it does not mean they are fake. Context is key. How does their art relate to their account history or profile description? A cartoonist may use their own or someone else's comic art. A well-known fan or blogger of a sports team may use iconography from that team or school.

What's In a (User) Name?

Next, examine the username. It has become common practice to assume that if a name is followed by a series of seemingly random numbers that the user is a bot. That is not always the case; there are plenty of "Bob Smiths," after all, and if you happen to be @BobSmith6593649, you may shrug and decide to keep your default name.[35] But a @BobSmi6593649 (notice the "th" is cut off) is more likely to be bot behavior. Look also for superfluous punctuation. Does that dash or asterisk or underscore really need to be there? In some cases, it does serve the purpose of differentiating organizations or users that share similar initials or names. When Mississippi State University's library joined Twitter in July 2009, they found that @msulibraries was already taken by Michigan State University's library, which joined Twitter in September 2007. Mississippi State adapted by adding an underscore to their Twitter moniker, @msu_libraries. American Idol winner David Cook also had a unique situation when it turned out he shares a name with another singer. He created the username @TheDavidCook instead.

A manipulated username may also be expressly created to fool a user into clicking and retweeting, especially if the profile photo is also used for a legitimate account. Look even closer at spelling and the use of lettering. "@DonaldJTrunp" was easily misquoted by people who thought they were retweeting "@DonaldJTrump" (since deleted), thanks to a trick of the brain that makes us believe that the "n" is actually an "m." Twitter's use of sans serif fonts can also be employed to fool the eye; a lower-case L will often be used in place of an upper-case "i" to fool users. If you are wary of a Twitter username, copy and paste it into a Word doc and change the font to one with serifs (like Times New Roman) and see what changes.



Brandon Marcello @bmarcello · 4h

Below is a fake account spreading lies. Do me a favor and report it.

Brandon Marcello @bmarcello · 5h

#Breaking 247Sports has learned that #Auburn Head Football Coach Gus Malzhan has tested positive for COVID-19. May have infected up to 8 players.

Figure 12.2.
College football reporter Brandon Marcello (@bmarcello) asks readers to report an impersonator account spreading misinformation. The impostor took advantage of Twitter's penchant for sans serif and utilized a common trick by replacing lower-case "L" with upper-case "i." Note the blue verification badge marking the legitimate account (Reproduced with permission from Brandon Marcello).

Advanced Bot Detection

Say you cannot fully determine legitimacy based on the profile photo and username. Your next steps are to examine the Twitter account's activity. Cindy Otis, author of the book *True or False: A CIA Analyst's Guide to Spotting Fake News*, gives suggestions in her Twitter posts on signs to watch. Check the "Who to Follow" suggestions from Twitter, based on the account; suspicious bot-like followers using other languages (particularly Russian) are a giveaway.[36] Also, look at the types of posts they make. They may all post the same clickbait stories or do nothing but retweet posts with no original content of their own, or they may post more than fifty to 100 times a day, a sign of automation.[37] Beware of posts that use link shorteners such as bit.ly, because they can disguise the actual name of the website they redirect you to.[38] If those signs are not obvious, check their followers. Are they exhibiting bot behavior? Are all their followers one gender, do they seem to follow a lot of fellow bots, or do they only comment with one or two words? All of these are signs of bots designed to manipulate the algorithm and the conversation.[39]

"Twitter-Verified"

In 2009, Twitter began to verify user accounts with a blue checkmark designation. This was generally reserved for celebrities and other public figures, but in 2016, Twitter opened up their verification program to an application process.[40] This was a helpful tool for burgeoning artists and authors, new candidates for political office, and others who wanted to use Twitter for marketing, publicity, and updates. It also helped to halt the practice of "squatting," wherein someone hijacks a notable person's username and imitates them on Twitter (or is willing to release the name—for a price).

In order to check for Twitter verification, look for the blue verified badge. It should appear next to the user's name on their account profile, including on posts that appear in the news feed and on search results. If the blue check appears on the profile anywhere but next to the account owner's name, such as in the profile photo, background, header image, or biography, then it is not an officially Twitter-verified account. Remember that not everyone chooses to use Twitter verification for one reason or another, but if they are trying to pass themselves off as verified, that is a red flag.[41] Ultimately, however, even a legitimate account may have an oddly formatted username or lack a blue check. Take, for example, the Emmett Till Interpretive Center in Sumner, Mississippi, mentioned earlier. Their Twitter handle is @EmmeTillcenter. Someone examining the account may note the odd capitalization, the blending of the first and last name, or the lower-case "c" in "Center." There is also no verification check. But it is the actual account, with news on the center's mission, fundraising, and preservation efforts.

When and How to Use Tweets as Sources

After you have evaluated the account, checked the facts behind the tweet, and determined the reason it is trending, the final question remains: is this even a story? Trending topics can be manipulated, after all, and reporters not familiar with trolling and communities in Reddit and 4-Chan can inadvertently amplify extremist talking points. Some things to consider include:

- Where is the "tipping point" of the information? For example, has the shared content spread outside the community to more of the general public? Or would reporting on the information only give oxygen to the disinformation?[42]
- How familiar are you with the online community in question, including their Twitter tactics? If you feel uncomfortable or ill-equipped to report, the editor may be able to reassign the lead.[43]
- Tweets are not replacements for actual interviews and are not a virtual "person on the street." Try not to gather a series of tweets and claim they are representative of general online opinion.[44]

Determining whether a tweet is newsworthy comes down to what makes any information newsworthy. Does reporting the information provide a social benefit? And what are the risks of harm to the individuals involved? In the activity following this chapter, one of the questions students will answer is if a tweet is actually news or at least contributing something worthwhile to a news event. Whether in a classroom or in the newsroom, student and professional journalists alike must consider all of this before deciding to report.[45]

Conclusion

The New Reporter's Toolkit

As the proliferation of smartphones increases with the speed and reach of data networks, news breaking over social media is a given fact for the foreseeable future. Since Twitter and other social media have upended the traditional journalism model, reporters now have to be increasingly vigilant about what they write and publish. In the service of journalistic objectivity, they risk trading facts for perceived neutrality and "balance," accuracy for speed, and guarding the gates for handing over the keys. As today's student reporters graduate from their respective institutions, it is imperative that they enter their newsrooms armed with the fact-checking tools of the new information age:

1. to understand the methods used to cause stories to trend and go viral, and how those can be manipulated to amplify false information;
2. to critically evaluate sources, no matter what form they take, what their username is, or what their profile photo looks like, and to recognize the tools and methods that bad actors use to fool readers;
3. to know when something is a story and when it is not. Recognize when dropping a story is the right choice to maintain journalistic integrity and not feed the "fake news" machine.

Learning Activity

Bot or Not: Recognizing Fake News Primary Sources on Social Media

Description:
Using tools and methods learned in this chapter to evaluate social media accounts and posts, students will determine 1) the legitimacy of various tweets, based on the Twitter account's user information, and 2) the reason that a tweet may have trended.

Student learning outcomes:

1. Students will be able to evaluate the veracity of a social media post.
2. Students will understand how and why a post trends.

Time to run activity:
15–20 minutes

Preparation:
Print out tweets that have gone viral or have been used as sources by news outlets; a sampling of tweet images may be found at this link: https://drive.google.com/drive/

folders/1zSl2BhyqkiJLQzECMZd72TUmer6p6_R_?usp=sharing. Include links to the original tweets if available.

Teaching plan:

1. Divide students into small groups of 2–3 each (depending on class size).
2. Give each group a copy of a tweet, along with the link, if available.
3. Groups have 5–10 minutes to evaluate elements of the tweet, based on tools and methods taught in the class:
    a. The user's account, including the profile picture, username, bio, location, followers, and other information
    b. The content of the tweet itself
    c. The ratio of comments, retweets, and likes, and the types of comments
4. After the evaluation, groups will reconvene and report to the class their findings.
    a. Is this a "real" Twitter account? If not, is this a troll, a parody account, a bot, or some other type?
    b. How did you determine the legitimacy/illegitimacy of the user?
    c. If it is a legitimate account, why did the tweet trend?
    d. Is this tweet newsworthy? Why or why not?

Helpful hints:

Since tweets can be deleted or made unavailable (the account is locked, tweet deleted by user, account suspended/deleted by Twitter Support, etc.) it is a good idea to keep an updated "library" of tweets for this exercise. I also include the tweets in slides at the end of the PowerPoint to review along with the students.

Recommended readings:

Golden, Jamie Nesbitt. "What Happens When A Journalist Uses Your Tweets for A Story? (Part One)." Medium. November 16, 2015. http://medium.com/thoughts-on-media/what-happens-when-a-journalist-uses-your-tweets-for-a-story-part-one-a8f3db9340ad.

In the aftermath of protests at the University of Missouri, a *Washington Post* blogger published tweets from a professor's locked Twitter account. This example and others raise questions about the ethics of using tweets as sources and expectations of privacy in social media. It also opens the conversation of when tweets are an important part of the news story.

Ingram, Matthew. "Source Hacking: How Trolls Manipulate the Media (The Media Today)." *Columbia Journalism Review* (September 12, 2019). https://www.cjr.org/the_media_today/trolls-manipulate-media.php.

Ingram's column summarizes a Data & Society report by Joan Donovan and Brian Friedberg explaining different techniques of *source hacking,* or intentionally feeding false information to legitimate news outlets. These techniques include viral sloganeering, leak forgery, evidence collages, and keyword

squatting. Case study examples and links to the full report are included and may serve as a cautionary tale for reporters seeking “both sides-ism.”

Stevens, Ashlie D. “Don’t Feed ‘The Little Mermaid’ Racist Trolls: Sketchy Accounts Fuel Anti-Ariel Outrage.” Salon. July 8, 2019. https://www.salon.com/2019/07/08/dont-feed-the-little-mermaid-racist-trolls-sketchy-accounts-fuel-anti-ariel-outrage/.

The Salon article illustrates several examples of hijacked hashtags, falsified Facebook groups, and other social media manipulations that are intended to amplify false messages about the casting of Ariel. Mentioned also are how similar techniques stirred up fake outrage over *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* in 2015 and how a few news outlets who took the bait unintentionally spread the message.

Swasy, Alecia. “I Studied How Journalists Used Twitter for Two Years. Here’s What I Learned.” Poynter. March 22, 2017. https://www.poynter.org/tech-tools/2017/i-studied-how-journalists-used-twitter-for-two-years-heres-what-i-learned/.

This Poynter Institute article by Alecia Swasy summarizes her book *How Journalists Use Twitter: The Changing Landscape of U.S. Newsrooms*. Swasy discusses ways in which Twitter has become part of the reporters’ “toolbox” and includes examples of how newspapers have used Twitter for newsgathering, branding, outreach, beat monitoring, and community building. This provides a preview into the modern newsroom that burgeoning journalists are entering.

ENDNOTES

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