

Fake News Isn't About Truth, It's About Gaming Belief Systems

[cross-post from Medium]

Thinking about [#fakenews](#). Starting with "what is it".

- * We're not dealing with truth here: we're dealing with gaming belief systems. That's what fake news does (well, one of the things; another thing it does is make money from people reading it), and just correcting fake news is aiming at the wrong thing. Because...
- * Information leaves traces in our heads, even when we know what's going on. If I jokingly tell you that I've crashed your car, then go 'ha ha', you know that I didn't crash your car, but I've left a trace in your head that I'm an unsafe driver. The bigger the surprise of the thing you initially believe, the bigger the trace it leaves (this is why I never make jokes like that).
- * That's important because #fakenews isn't about the thing that's being said. It's about the things that are being implied. Always look for the thing being implied. That's what you have to counter.
- * Some of those things are, e.g. "Liberals are unpatriotic". "Terrorists are a real and present threat *to you*". Work out counters for these, and mechanisms for those counters. F'example: wearing US flags at protests and being loudly patriotic whilst standing up for basic rights is a good idea.
- * Yes, straighten the record, but you're not aiming at the person (or site) spouting fake news. What you *are* trying to change is their readers' belief in whether something is true.
- * America is a big country. Not everyone can go and see what's true or not. Which means they have to trust someone else to go look for them. The Internet is even bigger. Some of the things on it (e.g. beliefs about other people's beliefs) don't have physical touchpoints and are impossible to confirm or deny as 'truth'.
- * Which means you're trying to change the beliefs of large groups of people, who have a whole bunch of trust issues (both overtrust for in-group, and serious distrust of out-group people) and no direct proof.
- * You know who else hacks trust and beliefs in large groups? Salesmen and advertisers. Learn from them (oh, and propagandists, but you might want to be careful what you learn there).
- * People often hold conflicting beliefs in their heads (unless they're Aspie: Aspies have a hard time doing this). Niggling doubts are levers, even when people are still being defensive and doubling-down on their stated beliefs. Look for the traces of these.
- * But go gentle. Create too much cognitive dissonance, and people will shut down. Learn from the salesmen on this.
- * People are more likely to trust people they know. Get to know the people whose beliefs you want to change (even if it means hanging out in conservative chat channels). Also know that your attention is a resource: learn to distinguish between people who are engaged and might listen (hint: they're often the ones shouting at you), people who won't, and sock puppets.
- * More advertising tricks: look for influencers (not just on Twitter 'cos it's easy goddammit; check in the real world too). There's only one you: use that you wisely.

OverCognition

Journeys through development data.

<http://overcognition.com>

Some reading:

* A field guide to earthlings (the Aspie reference)

* Social psychology: a very short introduction

[How to culture jam a populist](#)