

Workshop on Information Credibility and Alternative Realities in Troubled Democracies

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Abstract

We propose the Workshop on Information Credibility and Alternative Realities in Troubled Democracies to be held in conjunction with the 15th annual International Conference on Web and Social Media (AAAI ICWSM). The workshop brings together researchers and practitioners to discuss how information credibility challenges lead to the emergence of alternative realities and how to mitigate their distorting effects on the public debate. The event consists of (1) a series of invited talks by reputed members of the information credibility community from both academia and industry, (2) a Call for Papers for contributed talks, and (3) collaborative activities to articulate future directions and build organizational capabilities.

Introduction

In the 2020 United States presidential election, most Republican voters falsely believed that Donald Trump had won the election (Ramjug 2020). Despite a lack of any meaningful evidence of selection fraud, most Trump voters thought that voting in the United States, and mail-in voting, in particular, was unreliable (Pennycook and Rand 2021). Republican voters who were more politically informed were more likely to hold beliefs that contradicted the best available evidence (Pennycook and Rand 2021).

As this state of affairs dampens the prospects of a functioning deliberative democracy (Sunstein 2018), researchers have tried to understand the nature and origins of false beliefs (Flynn, Nyhan, and Reifler 2017; Nyhan 2020) and how to reduce their prevalence (Pennycook et al. 2020). Social media may have played a central role in offering a platform where false news seems to spread further and faster than the truth (Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral 2018). Social media has created not only decentralized modes of agency and expression (Shirky 2008) but also new vectors for mis- and disinformation through its unfiltered publication process (Lazer et al. 2018; Allcott, Gentzkow, and Yu 2019). Social media’s novel affordances suggest that new tools, concepts and technologies may be necessary to ensure the integrity of information ecosystems.

This workshop aims to bring together leaders across industry and academia to discuss pathways for diagnosis

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Time	Activity
09:00	Welcome and Introductions
09:30	Context: The Media Credibility Crisis
10:20	Break
10:30	Measure: Studying Trust and Beliefs
11:20	Break
11:30	Mitigate: Some Real-World Solutions
12:30	Lunch break
13:30	Organize: Advancing the Conversation

Table 1: Workshop Timeline

and intervention when information technologies complicate credibility assessments and facilitate the emergence of alternative realities. ICSWM offers an apt venue for this timely conversation, and we expect the workshop to cross-disciplinary bounds to work towards novel insights and future directions for important issues.

Workshop Format

Workshop type: Half-day meeting.

Workshop timing: 9 am, to 12.30 noon, followed by an optional after-lunch community organizing session from 13.30 to 14.30. See also Table 1

Workshop location: Zoom for presentations, GatherTown for discussions and break out groups, and Discord to chat before and after the workshop. We will also use a digital whiteboard (Mural) for visual collaborative ideation.

Proposed activities

This section outlines the list of proposed activities with special emphasis on group interactions. It also provides details on Keynotes and the *Call for papers*.

Welcome (30 minutes)

The welcome session serves to establish the workshop objectives, provide personal introductions, and layout a framework that guides the discussions. First, the organizing committee will introduce themselves and present their plans for the day. Next, we establish ground rules such that the remote interactions can be productive and explain the different

platforms used for the workshop. Finally, participants get to know each other through an ice breaker activity, where they are asked to pick any item from their room and tell the story behind it. 10-minute breaks follow workshop sections.

Context (50 minutes)

The context session's goal is to frame the issues collectively. It will be organized into three parts.

First, a talk by the organizing committee will discuss the history of communication and the media, focusing on the impact of the digital transition on the media landscape. This quick introduction will define key concepts and put everyone on the same page to facilitate fruitful interactions throughout the day.

Keynote: An invited practitioner will discuss the credibility crisis from the perspective of the traditional media as well as the emergence of digital journalism. We envision hosting Jonah Peretti, BuzzFeed's co-founder, or Frederic Filloux, journalist and Knight Fellow at Stanford University.

Finally, we will open a discussion to identify the main challenges induced by the media credibility crisis. In breakout rooms, we will ask subgroups to identify challenges from (1) the journalists' perspective, (2) the audience and (3) the policy-makers (each breakout room will treat one of these). We will then regroup to present the overview each group created on their collaborative whiteboard.

Measure (50 minutes)

In the second substantive session of the day, we will hear from talks that attempt to measure and diagnose information credibility's systematic issues.

Keynote: We will have one invited keynote, from someone like David Rand, Gordon Pennycook (the chances are high that one can join) or Renée DiResta.

Call for papers: We will continue with presentations from submitted projects on this topic.

Mitigate (50 minutes)

In this session, we will expose participants' to world experts work on the media credibility crisis.

Keynote: We will feature a company acting against information disorders. We aim at hosting Camille François, from Graphika, the leading social media analysis platform specialized in studying misinformation campaigns, or Maxime Voisin and Hugo Travers. They founded the start-up Splash that re-inform the youth with engaging content.

Call for papers: Finally, we will have presentations from submitted projects on mitigating information credibility issues.

Organize (60 minutes)

The organizing section is an optional additional activity after lunch to brainstorm on follow-up activities to continue the momentum built during the workshop. We will break out into the groups to (1) synthesize the discussions of the day and outline what ideas are most promising for future research, (2) figure out how we would like to stay in touch as a community, and (3) think about strategic partnerships with

organizations and practitioners in the field. We will then reconvene, and each of the breakout groups will present a proposal they created on their collaborative whiteboard.

Post-Workshop

Within a week, we will generate a report primarily building on the outcomes of the *organize* session. It will contain some milestones with dates for future meetings or events and participant contacts, and information about where we will continue our discussions online.

Submissions

Submissions will be short (e.g., 1-3 pages) papers corresponding to the general theme. They will be evaluated via light peer review by three distinct reviewers, including the three of us and several of our colleagues. We don't expect a program committee will be necessary. Below is a tentative version for our call for papers:

We're interested in a wide variety of topics related to information credibility online. Here's some things we'd love to see represented within the workshop:

1. Reports on the design and development of information credibility systems or on novel tools to measure or mitigate misinformation
2. Analyses (quantitative and qualitative) of false beliefs and credibility issues on social media that highlight avenues for intervention
3. Theories of and frameworks that conceptualize and address questions of trust and credibility on social media

Advertising

We created a website (<https://zivepstein.github.io/info-credibility-workshop/>) to advertise the workshop through universities and non-academic research institutions' mailing lists, as well as through social media.

We will publish the main workshop outcomes' through the website. As we wish for the workshop to launch a dynamic group of thinkers, we also wish to create a regular newsletter around the group's work after the workshop.

Related Workshops

No historical information is available as the workshop will be held for the first time. However, various related workshops have addressed questions of mistrust and false beliefs online. These include Integrity at WDSM 2021 and 2021, MisinfoWorkshop at WW 2019, ROME (Reducing Online Misinformation Exposure) at SIGIR 2019, Truth Discovery at ACM SIGKDD 2019, and OCeANS (Opinions, Conflict, and Abuse in a Networked Society) at SIGKDD 2018. Furthermore, the Truth and Trust Online forum (2019, 2020) and the Computation + Journalism Symposium (2014 to 2021) are relevant related events.

The proposed workshop differs by focusing on linking social theories to applied solutions for a multidisciplinary approach to the design of trusted information ecosystems.

Committee

Maurice Jakesch, Cornell University. Maurice is an Information Science Ph.D. candidate at Cornell University and a fellow at the Cornell Tech Digital Life Initiative and the German National Academic Foundation. He studies how people reason about credibility and authenticity in a networked society. Specifically, he asks how and why judgments of AI-generated content and political news are often misguided. Maurice holds a BS in Electrical Engineering from ETH Zurich, an MS in Information Technology from the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and an MA in Philosophy of Science and Technology from TU Munich.

Manon Revel, MIT. Manon Revel is a Social and Engineering System Ph.D. candidate at MIT and a Hammer Fellow. Manon studies news credibility and the trust crisis of journalism. She also works on political behaviors and electoral systems. She created and led web radio programs and is passionate about supporting and enhancing journalism's quality. Manon holds a BS in Engineering from École Centrale Paris, an MS in Applied Mathematics from École Centrale Paris, and a MS in Technology and Policy from MIT.

Ziv Epstein, MIT. Ziv Epstein is a Ph.D. student in the MIT Media Lab. His work integrates aspects of design and computational social science to understand and build cooperative systems. He focuses on new challenges and opportunities that emerge from a digital society, particularly in social media and artificial intelligence. Ziv holds a BA in Math and Computer Science from Pomona College and a MA in Media Arts and Sciences from MIT.

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