

Fact or Fiction

Using the Internet to Validate Facts

In this time when the accusation “liar liar” is heard from all corners and when distrust of institutions is very high, it is useful to get back to basics, the facts. We will be talking about how to use the Internet to validate facts or, in other words, check the veracity of a statement presented as fact.

Agenda

- Why you should listen to me
- Definitions of key terms
- How to use the Internet to validate facts

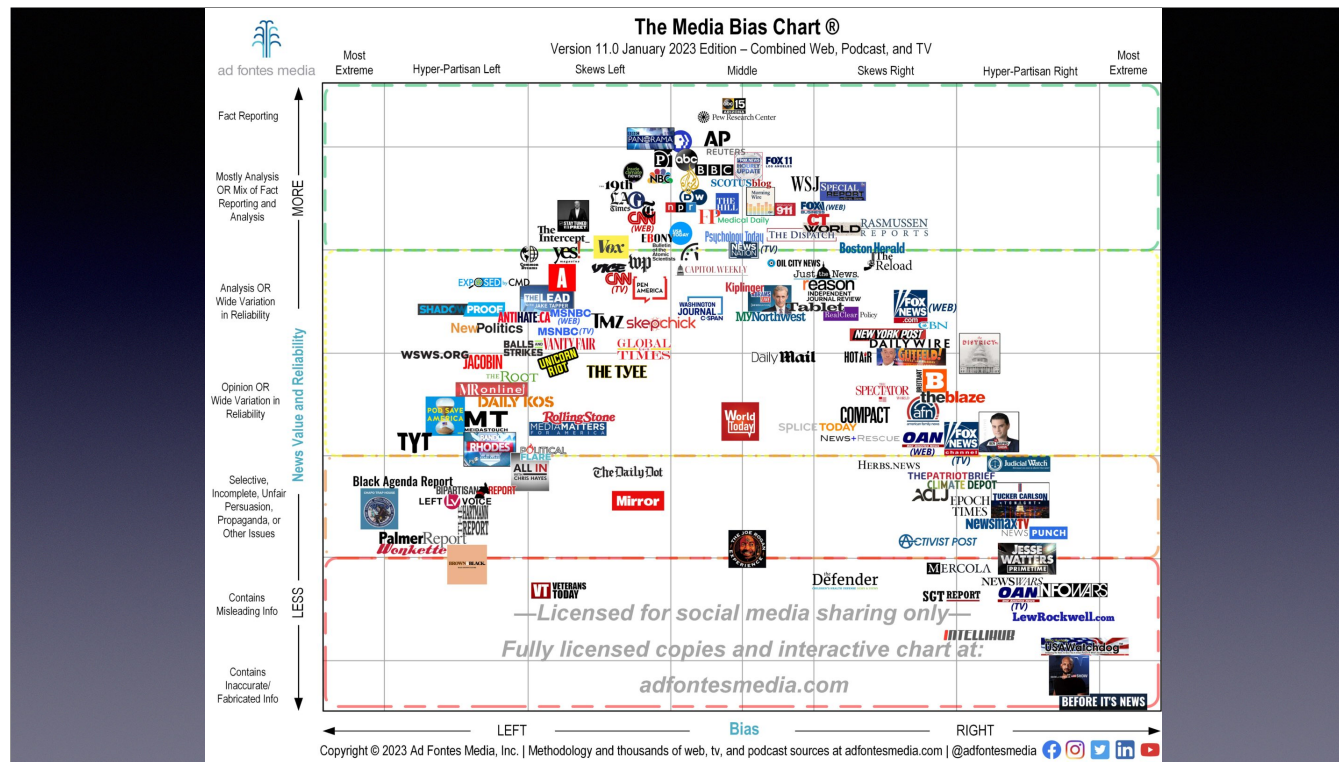
Ten minute break at 10:30
Feel free to interrupt

My Credibility

- Ad Fontes Media analyst since late 2019
- What is Ad Fontes Media?
- Record of items rated
 - 4,140 articles
 - 167 podcast episodes
 - 70 TV episodes
- Bias versus Reliability
- Reliability = Factuality

We are a for profit public benefit corporation.

I analyze with two others in shifts of usually three hours. We meet online in Zoom. One analyst is a left/lean in bias, one is a right/lean; I'm a center/lean. We have a list of articles assigned. We read them separately and apply a numerical score for bias and reliability. After everyone is turned in their scores we come together and compare them. If the difference is small we move onto the next article. If there is substantial disagreement we discuss and try to narrow our differences. The resulting three scores are averaged to produce our official reading for that article. Numerous articles from the same site, usually at least 12, then those scores are averaged together to produce a rating for the site.



Human Reasoning

Facts



Analysis



Conclusion



Opinion

Reasoning begins with facts

Vocabulary

- Truth versus Fact
- Definition of Truth
- Validity versus Veracity

In court witnesses are asked, “Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?”

Truth can refer to a simple fact, but it also has a broader sense. Today I'll be talking about facts not truth.

Vanessa Otero says, “The term “fact” is more appropriate to refer to things that can be objectively proven, independently of any person’s belief in them. These are things like the who, what, when, where, of a story, like “the Rockies won 7–2 yesterday,” or “it rained here today.”

Probability

- Factuality is not always a clear yes or no
- Thinking in Bets
- What is the probability that the Earth is flat?

“Thinking in Bets” by Annie Duke

Veracity

Veracity



1. True (Easily provable and widely accepted)
2. Mostly True (Mostly provable and mostly accepted)
3. Neither True nor False (Neither provable nor disprovable; subject to debate)
4. Mostly False (Mostly disprovable and the facts disproving are mostly accepted)
5. False (Easily disprovable and the facts disproving are widely accepted)

Invite participants to submit questions on index cards.

Techniques

- Ask why I trust or do not trust the statement
- Google the question
- Google reverse image search
- Use a fact checking site

Why am I asking?

- Confirmation Bias
- We all have it
- One example
- My Bias

There are some things that you probably don't have to question or try to verify through other sources; for example, reports of things that sound uncontroversial like the weather or an expected event. However, in other cases you will have reason to suspect that something you read might not be true. For example, something that sounds so controversial, or so damaging to one political party or another, that if it were true, many sources would likely be reporting on it.

tea totaler

Google the Question

- Is it true “...”
- Is it true that all dogs are descended from wolves?
- Truth is not always black and white.
- Did Romney tell Sorous “you don’t belong here.”
- Which source to trust

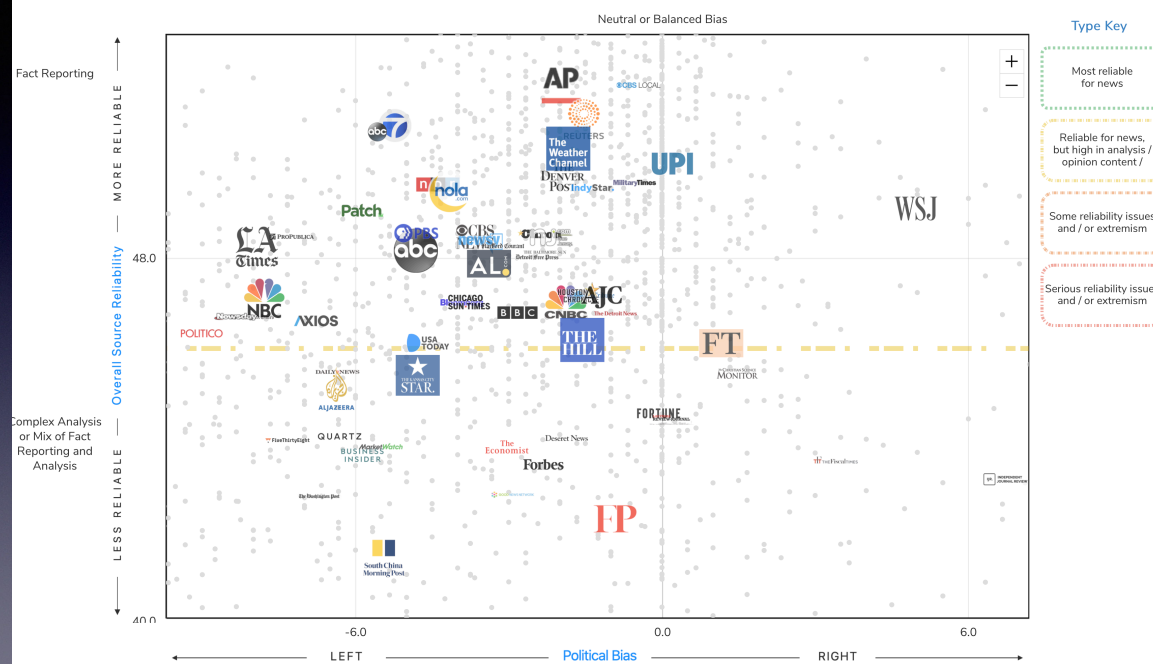
So how do we determine Veracity? We rely on the media ecosystem. One benefit of having many journalism outlets in this country is that we can rely on them to provide a check on each other—usually if one outlet gets something wrong, other sources will tell you about it.

Bias Effects Factuality

- In principle facts are independent of bias.
- In practice strong bias undermines its factuality
- Selectivity
- Comfort level
- The media, on the whole, is skewed left

Selectivity of subject and fact

THE MEDIA BIAS CHART



Media Bias Chart (R) Licensed Copy. Copyright Ad Fontes Media, Inc 2020 - Technology by elementive.io

NYT vs WSJ

[AFM Interactive Media Bias Chart](#)

Fact Checking Sites

- [FactCheck.org](https://www.factcheck.org/)
- [Snopes](https://www.snopes.com/)
- [Washington Post Fact](https://www.washingtonpost.com/fact-check/)
- [Politifact](https://www.politifact.com/)
- [The AP](https://www.theap.com/)
- [Reuters](https://www.reuters.com/fact-check/)

Fact Checking

- More than 340 fact-checking outlets now operate worldwide.
- They depend on trust
- Some are better than others
- [ISTE's List](#)
- [Sample](#)