Fake News and Fact–Checking
Workshop

Peter Gallert
Goethe Institut
Windhoek

24 January 2020
Workshop Outline

1. Participants’ Introduction
2. Topic Introduction
3. Evaluating News Sources
   - Theory of Information
   - Activity 1
   - A Bit More Theory
   - Activity 2
   - Fake News
   - Activity 3
4. Publishing Business Models
   - Money Trail
   - Media
5. Detecting fake news
   - Questions and Actions
   - Activity
Outline

1. Participants’ Introduction
2. Topic Introduction
3. Evaluating News Sources
4. Publishing Business Models
5. Detecting fake news
If you don’t know me...

- I’m **Peter Gallert**, IT lecturer at NUST
- I’m not a Sir
- Background: M.A. in Logic, Theory of Science, Communication Studies and Media Science
- Co–author and course designer of “Information Competence”, a NUST core course
- Wikipedia’s ambassador to Namibia
Activity

1. What should we know about you?
2. What do you hope to take away from here?
Outline

1. Participants’ Introduction
2. Topic Introduction
3. Evaluating News Sources
4. Publishing Business Models
5. Detecting fake news
Fake news: Definitions

- **News** = information that *is consumed* for its novelty and interest.
  “That’s news to me!”

- For what reasons it *is produced*, is another matter.

- **Fake news** = wrong information.
  Sometimes deliberate, sometimes inadvertent, sometimes due to incompetence.

- Different types of fake news:
  - **Hoax**: completely wrong, joke or prank. Example: Orson Welles’ “War of the Worlds”
  - **Deliberate misinformation**: Example: Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction
  - **Junk news**: badly researched and wrongly reported. Example: ’independent candidate’ Ituna
  - **False connections**: Evaluations and conclusions not supported by the facts. Example: ‘Hanse–Himarwa pockets 500k of S&T’
Reason for publishing

- Every action is motivated by something ⇒ What motivates news producers?
- Everything is published for a reason (Peter’s Law?)
  1. Activism . . . mostly bad
  2. Altruism . . . unlikely
  3. Power . . . bad
  4. Vanity . . . bad
  5. Money
    - Sales (bad)
    - Salary (good)
- Publish from a desire to share information, or induce knowledge? ⇒ That’s naïve.
Topic Introduction

Reason for publishing

- Every action is motivated by something ⇒ What motivates news producers?
- Everything is published for a reason (Peter’s Law?)
  1. Activism ... mostly bad
  2. Altruism ... unlikely
  3. Power ... bad
  4. Vanity ... bad
  5. Money
    - Sales (bad)
    - Salary (good)
- Publish from a desire to share information, or induce knowledge? ⇒ That’s naïve.
Reason for publishing

- Every action is motivated by something ⇒ What motivates news producers?
- Everything is published for a reason (Peter’s Law?)
  1. Activism . . . mostly bad
  2. Altruism . . . unlikely
  3. Power . . . bad
  4. Vanity . . . bad
  5. Money
    - Sales (bad)
    - Salary (good)
- Publish from a desire to share information, or induce knowledge? ⇒ That’s naïve.
Outline

1. Participants’ Introduction
2. Topic Introduction

3. Evaluating News Sources
   - Theory of Information
   - Activity 1
   - A Bit More Theory
   - Activity 2
   - Fake News
   - Activity 3

4. Publishing Business Models

5. Detecting fake news

Peter Gallert (Goethe)
To evaluate an information source you need to know:

1. the type and amount of interpretation in the text ⇒ the level of abstraction
2. the type and amount of opinion in the text ⇒ the level of judgment
3. the sources of the publication
4. the reason for publication

Good sources (scientific papers, newspaper features, certain text books) make these items explicit.

By contraposition: a source that is silent about it is bad. Examples: op-ed newspaper articles, SMS’s and most reader’s letters, advertorials, short or sloppy articles
To evaluate an information source you need to know:
1. the type and amount of interpretation in the text ⇒ the level of abstraction
2. the type and amount of opinion in the text ⇒ the level of judgment
3. the sources of the publication
4. the reason for publication

Good sources (scientific papers, newspaper features, certain text books) make these items explicit.

By contraposition: a source that is silent about it is bad. Examples: op-ed newspaper articles, SMS’s and most reader’s letters, advertorials, short or sloppy articles
Level of abstraction

1. What is the factual basis of this publication?
   - **Data**: Measurements
   - **Primary information**: Interpretations of measurements
   - **Secondary information**: Evaluation and explanation of interpretations
   - **Tertiary information**: Overview of mainstream evaluations and explanations

2. Example (abstractions in italics):
   - **Data**: 0.86
   - **Primary information**: The driver had a breath alcohol concentration of 0.86‰.
   - **Secondary information**: The accident was caused by a drunk driver.
   - **Tertiary information**: Many accidents in Namibia are caused by driving under the influence of alcohol.

3. Is that basis itself reliable?
Level of abstraction

1. What is the factual basis of this publication?
   - **Data:** Measurements
   - **Primary Information:** Interpretations of measurements
   - **Secondary Information:** Evaluation and explanation of interpretations
   - **Tertiary Information:** Overview of mainstream evaluations and explanations

2. Example (abstractions in italics):
   - **Data:** 0.86
   - **Primary Information:** The driver had a *breath alcohol concentration* of 0.86‰.
   - **Secondary Information:** The accident *was caused by a drunk driver.*
   - **Tertiary Information:** *Many accidents in Namibia* are caused by driving under the influence of alcohol.

3. Is that basis itself reliable?
Level of abstraction

1. What is the factual basis of this publication?
   - **Data**: Measurements
   - **Primary information**: Interpretations of measurements
   - **Secondary information**: Evaluation and explanation of interpretations
   - **Tertiary information**: Overview of mainstream evaluations and explanations

2. Example (abstractions in italics):
   - **Data**: 0.86
   - **Primary information**: The driver had *a breath alcohol concentration* of 0.86‰.
   - **Secondary information**: The accident *was caused by a drunk driver*.
   - **Tertiary information**: *Many accidents in Namibia* are caused by driving under the influence of alcohol.

3. Is that basis itself reliable?
Evaluate sample information

Activity

1. Pick an article from your newspaper
2. Determine if it is primary, secondary, or tertiary information
3. State on what lower-level information it is based
4. Report back to the group
Level of judgment

1. In which role is the author?
   - Journalist
     1. Reporter
     2. Commentator
     3. Wordsmith
   - Politician
   - Scientist
   - Employee

2. Are author and publisher independent?

3. Is the publisher known to include controversial opinions?
Sources of the publication

1. Who authored it?
   - Knowledgeable in the subject? ⇒ **Reliable**?
   - No vested interests? ⇒ **Independent**?

2. Who published it?
   - Reputation for fact-checking? ⇒ **Reliable**?
   - No vested interests? ⇒ **Independent**?

3. Still relevant? (Check dates)
Evaluate an information source

Activity

1. Pick an article from today’s newspaper.
2. Is the **author** knowledgeable?
3. What are their vested interests?
4. Is the **publisher** reliable?
5. What are their vested interests?
6. Report back to the group
Fake news sources

- Prime people producing fake news:
  1. Narcissists
  2. Activists and zealots
  3. Salespeople
  4. Politicians

- Prime media carrying fake news:
  1. Social media
  2. Tabloid press
  3. Government publications
  4. Company publications
  5. Predatory scientific journals

People doing it for the money, on media that are sold, are the best we can get!

Not because they are impartial—but because their vested interest can be researched
Fake news sources

- **Prime people producing fake news:**
  1. Narcissists
  2. Activists and zealots
  3. Salespeople
  4. Politicians

- **Prime media carrying fake news:**
  1. Social media
  2. Tabloid press
  3. Government publications
  4. Company publications
  5. Predatory scientific journals

- People doing it for the money, on media that are sold, are the best we can get!
- Not because they are impartial—but because their vested interest can be researched

Peter Gallert (Goethe)
Fake news sources

- Prime people producing fake news:
  1. Narcissists
  2. Activists and zealots
  3. Salespeople
  4. Politicians

- Prime media carrying fake news:
  1. Social media
  2. Tabloid press
  3. Government publications
  4. Company publications
  5. Predatory scientific journals

- People doing it for the money, on media that are sold, are the best we can get!

- Not because they are impartial—but because their vested interest can be researched
Conspiracy Theories

- **Conspiracy Theories:** “Big fake news” that one person alone cannot uphold
- Current mainstream narrative *versus* alternative explanation
- Or: majority view *versus* minority view

- Examples:
  - Moon landing
  - September 11 LIHOP / MIHOP
  - Operation Gladio
  - Healthy food

- ... until the roles are swapped one day
- Calling something a ‘conspiracy theory’ is a great way to establish one!
- Gladio is a conspiracy theory that swapped. ‘Stay Behind’ operations have now been admitted
- Healthy food to follow soon...
Conspiracy Theories

- **Conspiracy Theories**: “Big fake news” that one person alone cannot uphold
- Current mainstream narrative *versus* alternative explanation
- Or: majority view *versus* minority view
- Examples:
  - Moon landing
  - September 11 LIHOP / MIHOP
  - Operation Gladio
  - Healthy food
- ... until the roles are swapped one day
- Calling something a ‘conspiracy theory’ is a great way to establish one!
- Gladio is a conspiracy theory that swapped. ‘Stay Behind’ operations have now been admitted
- Healthy food to follow soon...
Conspiracy Theories

- **Conspiracy Theories**: “Big fake news” that one person alone cannot uphold
- Current mainstream narrative *versus* alternative explanation
- Or: majority view *versus* minority view
- Examples:
  - Moon landing
  - September 11 LIHOP / MIHOP
  - Operation Gladio
  - Healthy food
- ...until the roles are swapped one day
- Calling something a ‘conspiracy theory’ is a great way to establish one!
- Gladio is a conspiracy theory that swapped. ‘Stay Behind’ operations have now been admitted
- Healthy food to follow soon...
Conspiracy Theories

- **Conspiracy Theories**: “Big fake news” that one person alone cannot uphold
- Current mainstream narrative *versus* alternative explanation
- Or: majority view *versus* minority view
- Examples:
  - Moon landing
  - September 11 LIHOP / MIHOP
  - Operation Gladio
  - Healthy food
- . . . until the roles are swapped one day
- Calling something a ‘conspiracy theory’ is a great way to establish one!
- Gladio is a conspiracy theory that swapped. ‘Stay Behind’ operations have now been admitted
- Healthy food to follow soon . . .
Examples from Namibia

1. Herero and Namaqua genocide
   - Wasn’t really a genocide
   - Numbers of death Herero and Nama exaggerated
   - Namibians started the armed conflict
   - von Trotha wasn’t authorised by Germany

2. Lubango Dungeons
   - Never existed
   - Only criminals and spies were incarcerated
   - The end (independence) justified the means
Activity
1. Discuss your favorite conspiracy theory
2. What side are you on?
3. Report back one case from the group
Outline

1. Participants’ Introduction
2. Topic Introduction
3. Evaluating News Sources
4. Publishing Business Models
   - Money Trail
   - Media
5. Detecting fake news
Money trail: Practice

- Journalist, editor, presenter $\Rightarrow$ salary
- or: Journalist $\Rightarrow$ commission, bribe, perks
- Owner $\Rightarrow$ profit
- Scientist $\Rightarrow$ salary, but also research funds, travelling perks, status
- Blogger? YouTuber? Influencer? $\Rightarrow$ commission, salary, ad contract, sponsored posts
- Web site owner $\Rightarrow$ subscription fee, ad clicks
- Wikipedia $\Rightarrow$ readers’ donations
Money trail: Practice

- Journalist, editor, presenter ⇒ salary
- or: Journalist ⇒ commission, bribe, perks
- Owner ⇒ profit
- Scientist ⇒ salary, but also research funds, travelling perks, status
- Blogger? YouTuber? Influencer? ⇒ commission, salary, ad contract, sponsored posts
- Web site owner ⇒ subscription fee, ad clicks
- Wikipedia ⇒ readers’ donations
Money trail: Practice

- **Journalist, editor, presenter** ⇒ salary
- or: **Journalist** ⇒ commission, bribe, perks
- **Owner** ⇒ profit
- **Scientist** ⇒ salary, but also research funds, travelling perks, status
- **Blogger? YouTuber? Influencer?** ⇒ commission, salary, ad contract, sponsored posts
- **Web site owner** ⇒ subscription fee, ad clicks
- **Wikipedia** ⇒ readers’ donations
Money trail: Practice

- **Journalist, editor, presenter** ⇒ salary
- or: **Journalist** ⇒ commission, bribe, perks
- **Owner** ⇒ profit
- **Scientist** ⇒ salary, but also research funds, travelling perks, status
- **Blogger? YouTuber? Influencer?** ⇒ commission, salary, ad contract, sponsored posts
- **Web site owner** ⇒ subscription fee, ad clicks
- **Wikipedia** ⇒ readers’ donations
Money trail: Theory

1. Who earns money? directly, or indirectly
2. How is money earned?

Why is that important? Because nobody will endanger their income!

Impossible:
- *The Namibian* reporting on Tangeni Amupadhi taking a bribe
- *Informanté* praising achievements of UNAM
- *UNAM* reporting student figures that are too low
- *NABTA* reporting taxi figures that are too high
- *Wikipedia* making software changes that alienates its readers
- *Peter* suggesting fundamental changes to the tertiary education sector

Soliciting such information likely creates fake news
Mass Media

- Classic mass media have **editorial content** and **advertisements**
  - Editorial content: to *circulate* the mass medium
    - content (movies, news, features)
    - official announcements
    - opinion pieces
  - Advertisements: to *finance* the mass medium
    - classifieds
    - advertisements
    - advertorials
    - product placement
- Cover prices and subscription fees only make a small contribution
- Often a reliable source, because the publisher risks its reputation (by extension, media circulation and finance)
Mass Media

- Classic mass media have **editorial content** and **advertisements**
  - Editorial content: to *circulate* the mass medium
    - content (movies, news, features)
    - official announcements
    - opinion pieces
  - Advertisements: to *finance* the mass medium
    - classifieds
    - advertisements
    - advertorials
    - product placement
- Cover prices and subscription fees only make a small contribution
- Often a reliable source, because the publisher risks its reputation (by extension, media circulation and finance)
Mass Media

- Classic mass media have **editorial content** and **advertisements**
- Editorial content: to *circulate* the mass medium
  - content (movies, news, features)
  - official announcements
  - opinion pieces
- Advertisements: to *finance* the mass medium
  - classifieds
  - advertisements
  - advertorials
  - product placement
- Cover prices and subscription fees only make a small contribution
- Often a reliable source, because the publisher risks its reputation (by extension, media circulation and finance)
Books and journals

- Do not contain advertisement
- Are financed by their cover price?
  - Only bestsellers make money
  - Shelf warmers are financed by more successful publications
  - Although the Internet business has changed that somewhat (print-on-demand)
  - Desperate authors resort to self-publishing
- Academic publications do not reach high circulations
  - Are very expensive, or state-funded, sometimes both
  - Often the author pays (e.g. for PhD publications)
  - Often the author’s institution pays (e.g. for journal submissions)
  - Sometimes hidden in related expenses (e.g. conference fee)
  - Usually some government puts money in
- Normally very reliable sources, because there is a lot of control
Books and journals

- Do not contain advertisement
- Are financed by their cover price?
  - Only bestsellers make money
  - Shelf warmers are financed by more successful publications
  - Although the Internet business has changed that somewhat (print-on-demand)
  - Desperate authors resort to self-publishing
- Academic publications do not reach high circulations
  - Are very expensive, or state-funded, sometimes both
  - Often the author pays (e.g. for PhD publications)
  - Often the author’s institution pays (e.g. for journal submissions)
  - Sometimes hidden in related expenses (e.g. conference fee)
  - Usually some government puts money in
- Normally very reliable sources, because there is a lot of control
Books and journals

- Do not contain advertisement
- Are financed by their cover price?
  - Only bestsellers make money
  - Shelf warmers are financed by more successful publications
  - Although the Internet business has changed that somewhat (print–on–demand)
  - Desperate authors resort to self–publishing
- Academic publications do not reach high circulations
  - Are very expensive, or state–funded, sometimes both
  - Often the author pays (e.g. for PhD publications)
  - Often the author’s institution pays (e.g. for journal submissions)
  - Sometimes hidden in related expenses (e.g. conference fee)
  - Usually some government puts money in
- Normally very reliable sources, because there is a lot of control
Books and journals

- Do not contain advertisement
- Are financed by their cover price?
  - Only bestsellers make money
  - Shelf warmers are financed by more successful publications
  - Although the Internet business has changed that somewhat (print–on–demand)
  - Desperate authors resort to self–publishing
- Academic publications do not reach high circulations
  - Are very expensive, or state–funded, sometimes both
  - Often the author pays (e.g. for PhD publications)
  - Often the author’s institution pays (e.g. for journal submissions)
  - Sometimes hidden in related expenses (e.g. conference fee)
  - Usually some government puts money in
- Normally very reliable sources, because there is a lot of control
Internet Publications

- Inexpensive to produce
- May contain advertisements
  - Payment is only effected if customer clicks the banner
  - Often the content itself is an advertorial!
- May be artificially pushed high up into search engine results
  - By paying the search engine operators
  - By Search Engine Optimisation
- Often an unreliable source: low inclusion barriers, little control
- Exceptions:
  - Online versions of print media (newspapers, Google Books)
  - Academic collections (Google Scholar, JSTOR, CORBA)
  - Some academic online media (case–by–case)
  - To a certain extent: Wikipedia (depends on topic and article quality)
  - Official web sites of public institutions (government institutions, NGOs, standardising bodies, universities)
Internet Publications

- Inexpensive to produce
- May contain advertisements
  - Payment is only effected if customer clicks the banner
  - Often the content itself is an advertorial!
- May be artificially pushed high up into search engine results
  - By paying the search engine operators
  - By *Search Engine Optimisation*
- Often an unreliable source: low inclusion barriers, little control
- Exceptions:
  - Online versions of print media (newspapers, Google Books)
  - Academic collections (Google Scholar, JSTOR, CORBA)
  - *Some* academic online media (case–by–case)
  - To a certain extent: Wikipedia (depends on topic and article quality)
  - Official web sites of public institutions (government institutions, NGOs, standardising bodies, universities)
Internet Publications

- Inexpensive to produce
- May contain advertisements
  - Payment is only effected if customer clicks the banner
  - Often the content itself is an advertorial!
- May be artificially pushed high up into search engine results
  - By paying the search engine operators
  - By *Search Engine Optimisation*
- Often an unreliable source: low inclusion barriers, little control
- Exceptions:
  - Online versions of print media (newspapers, Google Books)
  - Academic collections (Google Scholar, JSTOR, CORBA)
  - *Some* academic online media (case–by–case)
  - To a certain extent: Wikipedia (depends on topic and article quality)
  - Official web sites of public institutions (government institutions, NGOs, standardising bodies, universities)
Internet Publications

- Inexpensive to produce
- May contain advertisements
  - Payment is only effected if customer clicks the banner
  - Often the content itself is an advertorial!
- May be artificially pushed high up into search engine results
  - By paying the search engine operators
  - By *Search Engine Optimisation*
- Often an unreliable source: low inclusion barriers, little control
- Exceptions:
  - Online versions of print media (newspapers, Google Books)
  - Academic collections (Google Scholar, JSTOR, CORBA)
  - *Some* academic online media (case–by–case)
  - To a certain extent: Wikipedia (depends on topic and article quality)
  - Official web sites of public institutions (government institutions, NGOs, standardising bodies, universities)
Outline

1. Participants’ Introduction
2. Topic Introduction
3. Evaluating News Sources
4. Publishing Business Models
5. Detecting fake news
   - Questions and Actions
   - Activity
Some Helpful Questions

1. Is it from a reliable source?
2. Is the author knowledgeable in the subject?
3. What is the motivation for writing / publishing it?
4. Could your own beliefs impact your impartiality? (Confirmation bias)
5. Could it be a joke? (Practise this on April 1!)
6. Do the reported facts support the statement?
7. Has the story been repeated elsewhere?
8. Is the date correct?
Some Helpful Actions

1. Re-read carefully: Is it consistent?
2. Find out who the author is.
3. Determine where it came from, and read close to the source.
4. Get evaluation from the other side, e.g. CNN and Al Jazeera, RT and Washington Post
5. Research the money trail: Who profits from publishing the story, who profits from your reading it?
6. Check if it is listed on snopes.com
Fake news detection

Activity

1. Pick a newspaper
2. Browse for red flags
3. Identify a fake news item
4. Report back
End of Workshop

Any questions?

- These slides are available on [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org) under CC–BY–SA 4.0