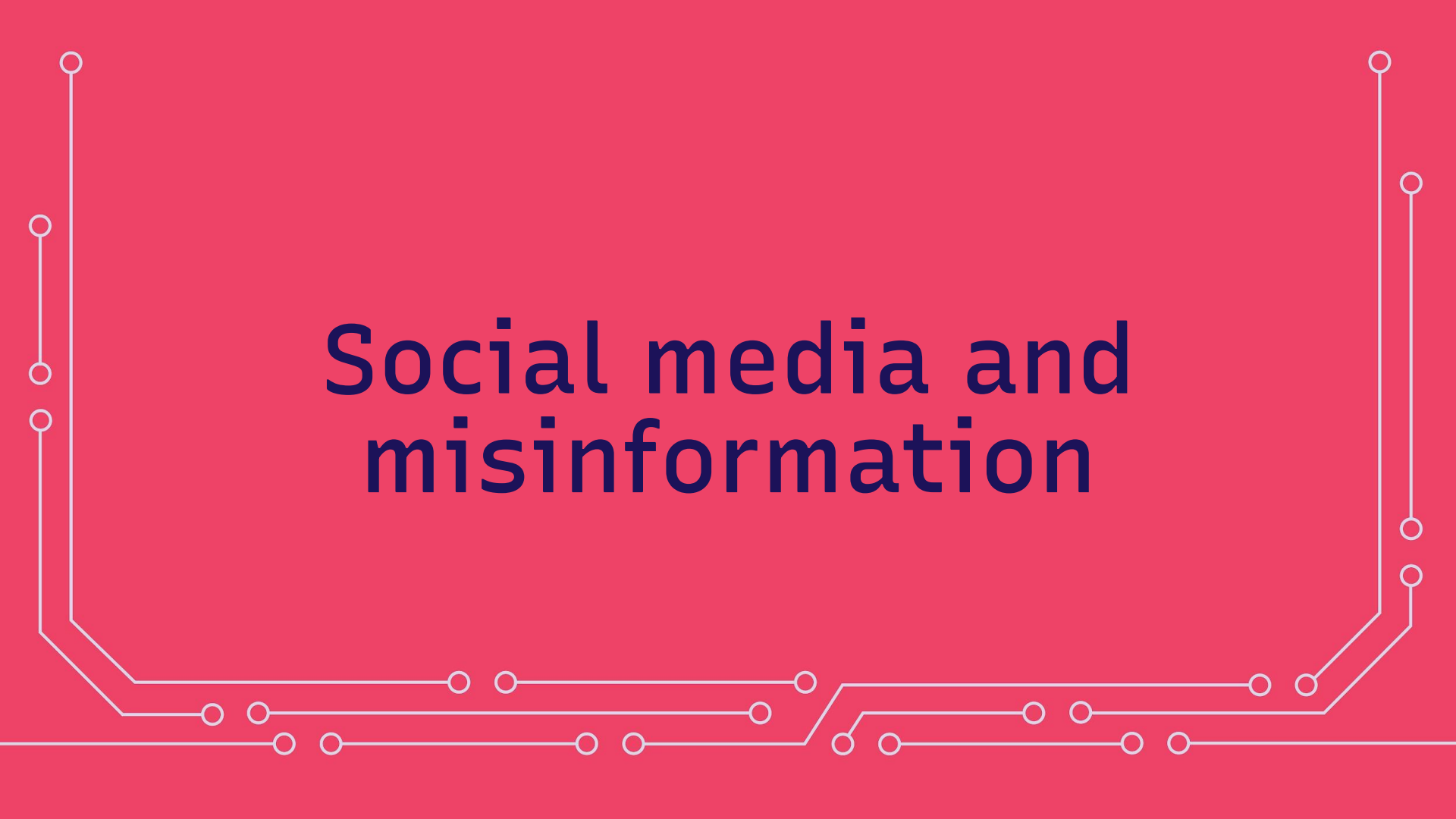
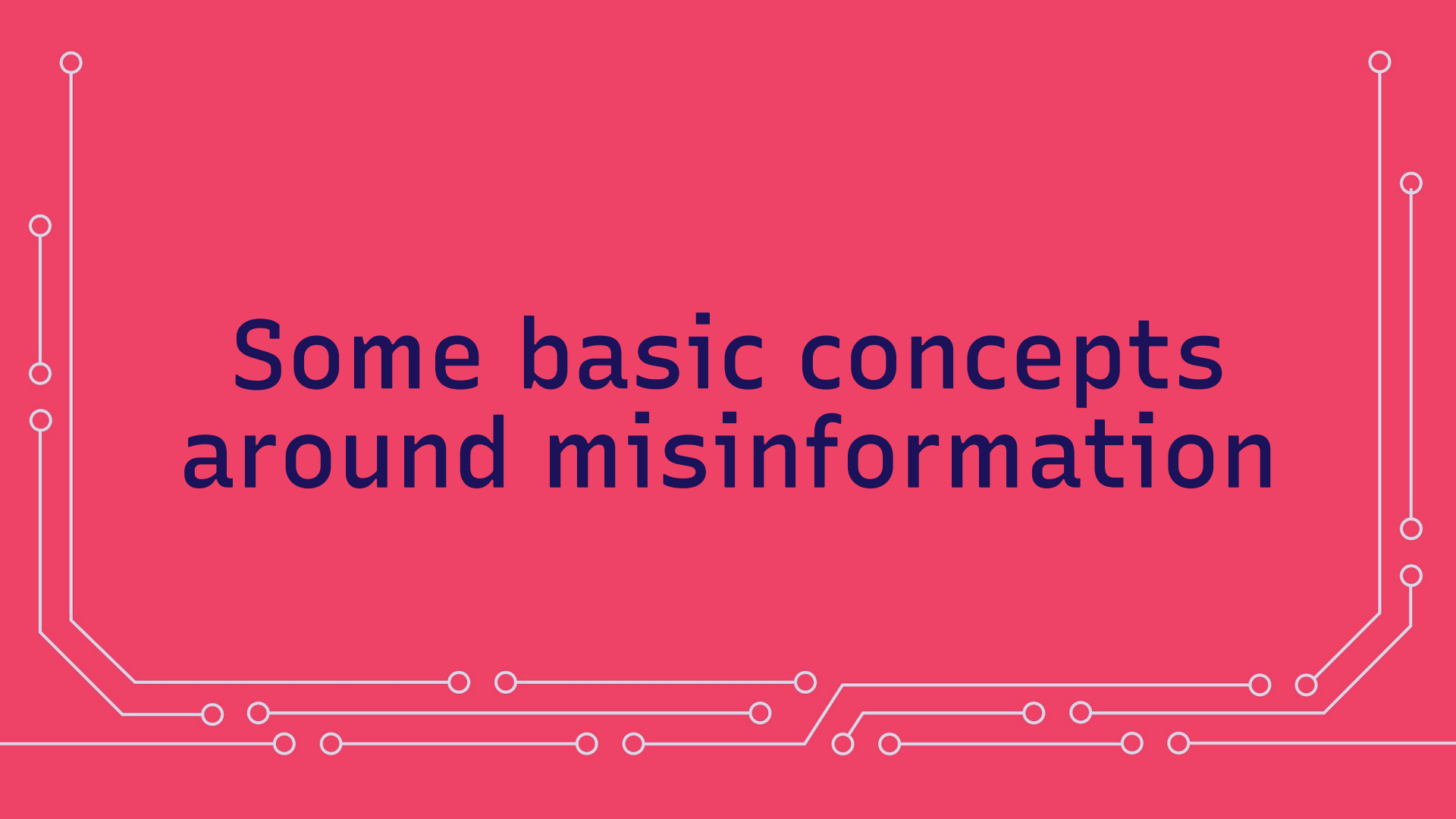




Social media and misinformation

What we will cover in this lecture

- Basic understanding
 - What are opinions vs. what are mis- and disinformation?
 - What roles does AI/do algorithms play in misinformation?
- Strategies on how you can cover misinformation

A decorative graphic consisting of white lines and small circles on a pink background, resembling a circuit board or a stylized frame. The lines are arranged in a rectangular shape with a central gap, and the circles are placed at various points along the lines, some at the corners and others along the edges.

Some basic concepts around misinformation

Terminology

Covering misinformation entails discussing how information flows on the social web.

There are many many many terms and concepts. But we will look at some that might be the most relevant to journalists covering online information flows.

Resources:

- [Misinformation glossary](#)
(be warned: 150 terms and the main source for these definitions)
- Resources on identifying and understanding misinformation from [First Draft News](#)

Terminology

Hate speech: Discourse that expresses hate or encourages violence towards a person or group based on inherited characteristics such as race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation.

Example: In Myanmar, military leaders and Buddhist nationalists used social media to slur and demonize the Rohingya Muslim minority ahead of and during a campaign of ethnic cleansing.

Terminology

Misinformation: Information that is false, but believed to be true by those disseminating it. It differs from disinformation in the absence of an intention to mislead or harm.

Example: During the pandemic, many people shared doctored images of wild animals flourishing in quarantined cities, thinking they were true.



Terminology

Disinformation: Information that is false and is disseminated intentionally to cause harm.

Example: During the 2016 U.S. presidential election, Russian agents posed as U.S. voters and organized fake protests meant to sew division.



Terminology: Media ecosystem

Media ecosystem:

- Who inhabits it?
- Who are active information providers?
- Who are manipulators?
- What is the system?



Terminology: Media ecosystem

Media ecosystem:

- Who inhabits it? ←
- Who are active information providers? ←
- Who are manipulators? ←
- What is the system? ←

Users, consumers, audience members, etc.

Officials, news orgs, influencers, etc.

Governments, political agents, trolls, etc.

Algorithms powering timelines



Approaches to investigating the social web

Choose a focus for your story

There are various ways to tackle stories about the social web. It all depends on what the central focal point of your story is:

1. Audience/Users
2. Actors
3. System



You chose: Audiences/Users

Unsuspecting people who
use the Internet.



Unsuspecting bored-at-work Neo who surfs the Internet

You chose: Audiences/Users

Quantified selfies – vasking for access to a person's data to look into how they experience social media.

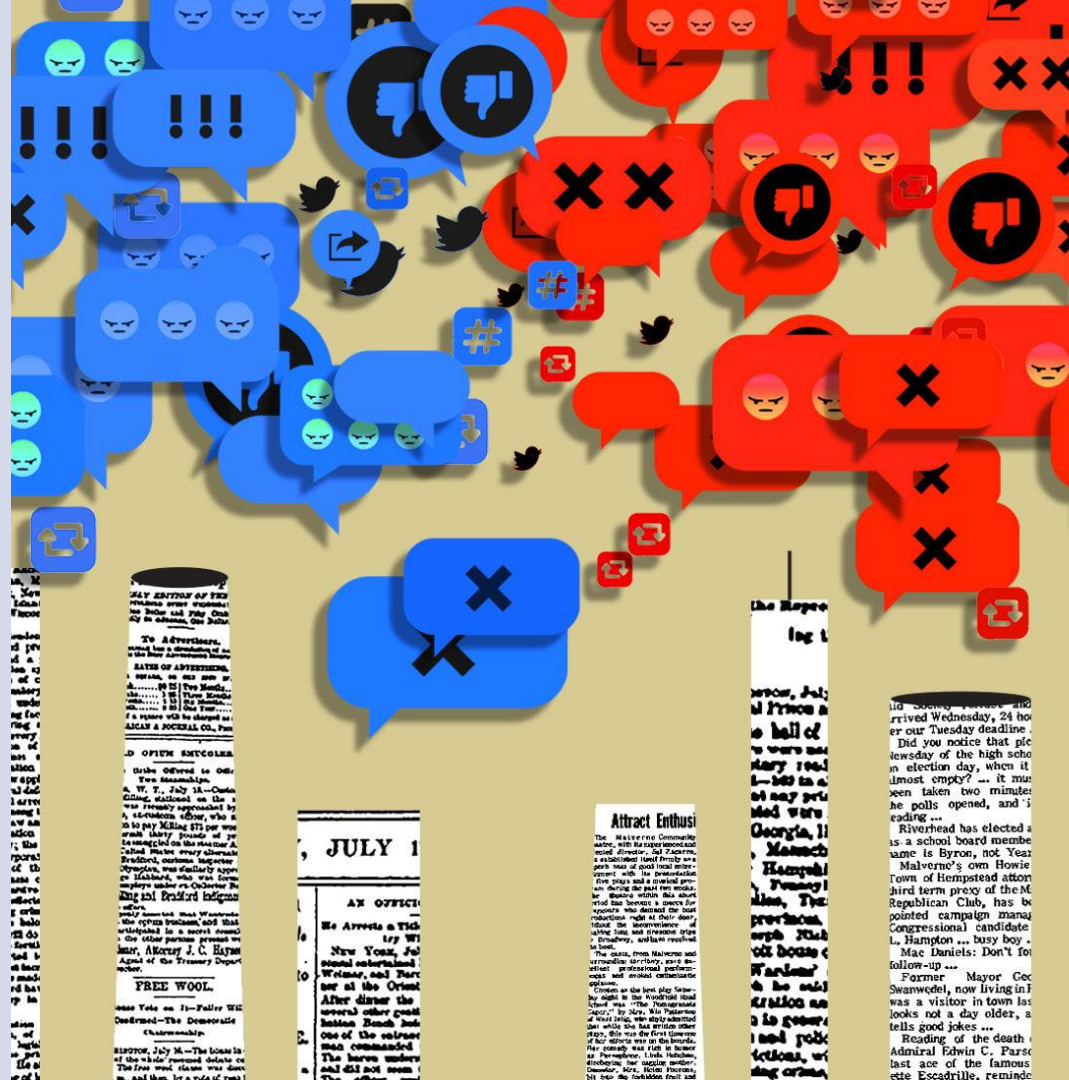
BuzzFeed News analyzed 2,367 posts from the Facebook News Feeds of a politically divided mother and daughter to show them just how different their online worlds are.



You chose: Audiences/Users

Harvesting social media data
– allows us to analyze
people's behavior online to
understand their collective
actions.

BuzzFeed News looked at
more than 4 million facebook
posts from 452 Facebook
Pages to get a better sense
of the hyperpartisan news
ecosystem.



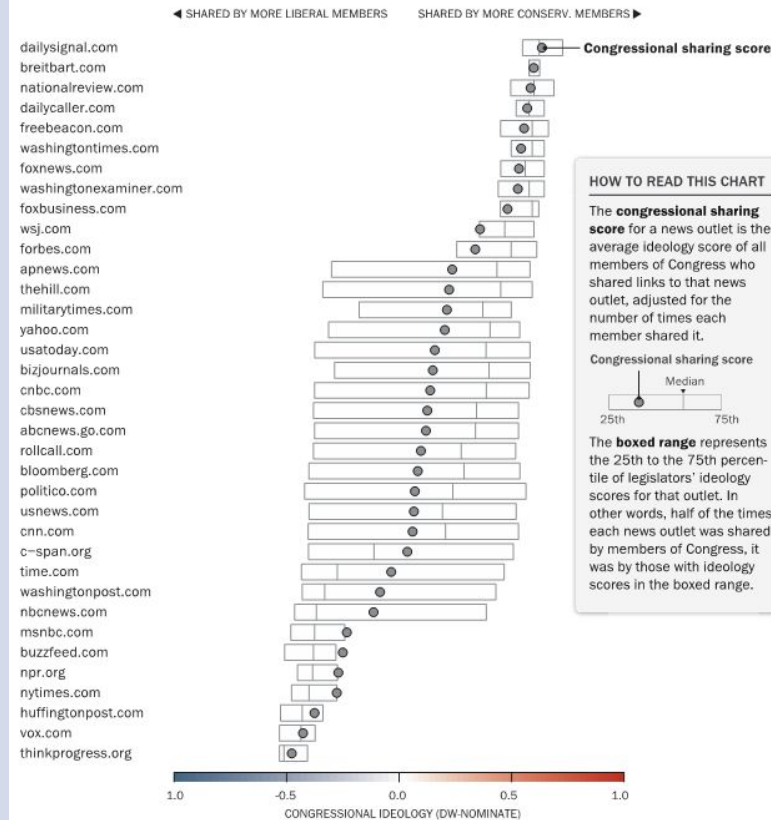
You chose: Audiences/Users

Harvesting social media data
– allows us to analyze
people's behavior online to
understand their collective
actions.

Allows us to hold powerful
people accountable.

Some news outlets' stories were linked to by members of Congress across the ideological spectrum; others mostly by liberals or conservatives in Congress

Congressional sharing score, by news outlet



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of links shared by members of Congress on Facebook between Jan. 2, 2015 and July 20, 2017. The outlets included in the list were linked to by members of Congress 200 times or more during that period. Legislator ideology from Voteview.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

You chose: Bad Actors

People, bots and cyborgs who target audiences with mis- or disinformation.

Understanding bad actors can come through:

- Content
- Individuals
- Activity



The mean people who are trying to dupe poor Neo

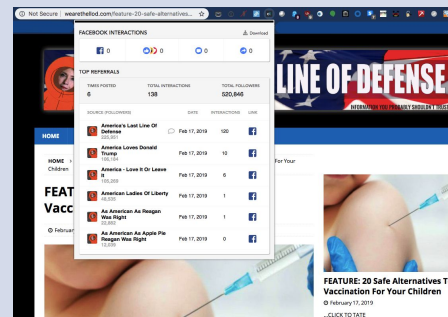
You chose: Bad Actors

You can look for bad actors by looking at the **content** from various websites.

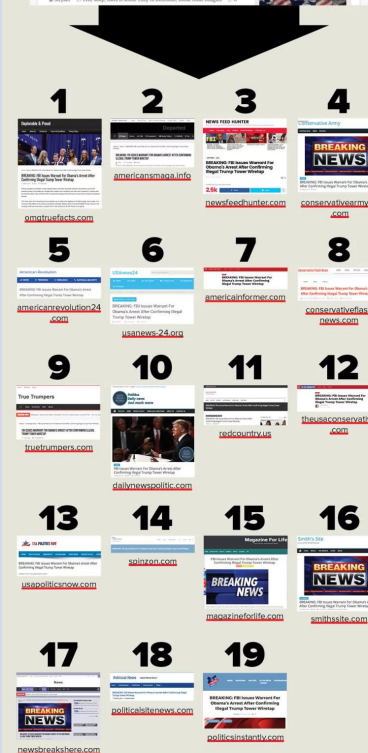
It can be helpful to see if people have simply copied content from one site and then pasted it across the internet. One tool called BuzzSumo showed that content from one website lived on 19 **other websites**.

Looking for links to this content on CrowdTangle revealed who the top sharers of these stories were across social media.

Both show possible bad actor networks.



This hoax from The Resistance was immediately reposted by 19 other websites



You chose: Bad Actors

You can also look for bad actors by looking who shares content across various websites.

In one story from Code for Africa, reporters found that a network of 16 Facebook accounts, not based in Ghana, systematically spread misinformation in Ghana by simply copying and pasting the same post over and over again.



Source: [*African Digital Democracy Observatory*](#)

You chose: Bad Actors

Data collected from websites and social networks was used to identify disinformation coming from Macedonia.

In 2016 BuzzFeed News traced over 100 active websites to Veles using domain registration records. Corresponding FB pages had hundreds of thousands of followers.



You chose: Bad Actors

"I started the site for a easy way to make money. In Macedonia the economy is very weak and teenagers are not allowed to work, so we need to find creative ways to make some money. I'm a musician but I can't afford music gear. Here in Macedonia the revenue from a small site is enough to afford many things."



You chose: Bad Actors

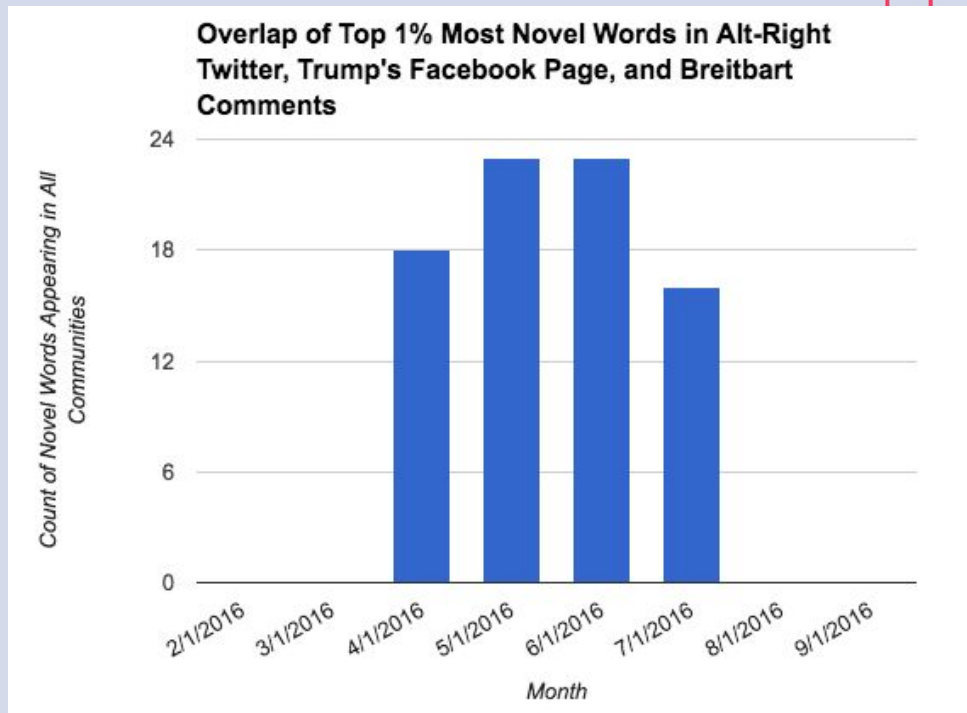
Reporters from a Swiss public broacas used machine learning to identify fake accounts. They purchased 5,000 fake accounts, trained their machine learning model on the characteristics of those fake accounts and then identified other fake accounts using this trained model.



You chose: Bad Actors

Natural language processing is the process of looking at a giant corpus of text and then splitting it up into parts (words, sentences, etc.) to analyze it.

Data For Democracy looked at “shifts in the comments and tweets posted [...] which show that [they] adopted eerily similar language during the same period of time.” These were actors who likely worked together across different platforms.



You chose: Bad Actors

Once Data For Democracy identified 'sockpuppet accounts' they were able to find linguistic differences between them and 'normal' users.

*While typical users made liberal use the exclamation mark, averaging almost one per message, sockpuppets were even more enthusiastic, using exclamation points at more than double the rate of normal accounts. For example, messages like “**Donald Trump For President!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**” (14 exclamation points!) were not uncommon.*

You chose: The system

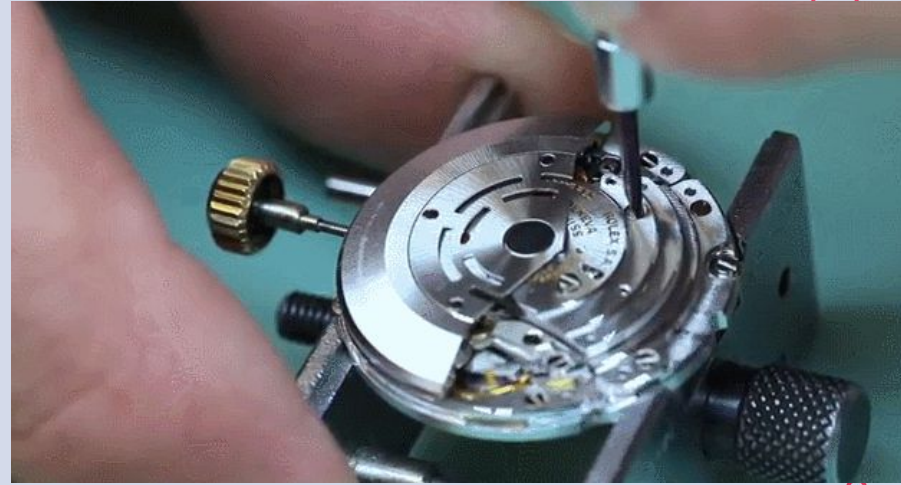
These stories look at the system that governs much of our online experiences, which includes the impact of algorithms on the distribution of information and on access to opportunities.



The Matrix... uhm, I mean, the system

You chose: The system

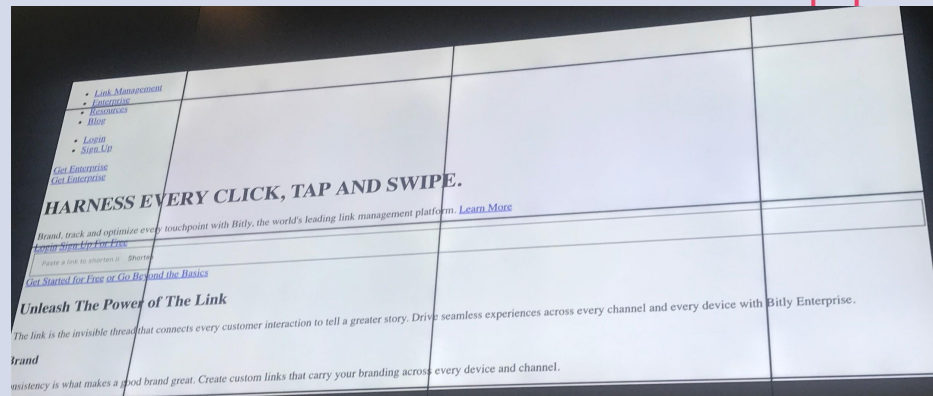
Looking under the hood/taking it apart – one way to investigate the social web is to simply explain it.



You chose: The system

Goodbye Big Five was a series that looked into what life would be like if we stopped using Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, Google and Facebook.

Amazon, for instance, runs much of our online activities. The devices of Kashmir Hill, the reporter, collectively 'pinged' Amazon just shy of 300,000 times in one week.



Bit.ly without AWS (Credit: [Dhruv Mehrotra](#))

You chose: The system

Poking the system – you don't always have to explain systems. You can simply prove that it does harm.

In this story from ProPublica, reporters set up an account to place Facebooks ads and found that the platform would not stop themn from placing racist and discrminatory ads.

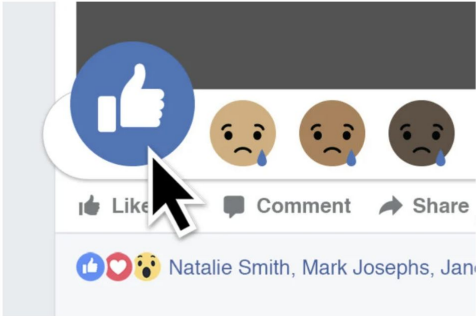


MACHINE BIAS

Facebook Lets Advertisers Exclude Users by Race

Facebook's system allows advertisers to exclude black, Hispanic, and other "ethnic affinities" from seeing ads.

by Julia Angwin and Terry Parris Jr., Oct. 28, 2016, 1 p.m. EDT



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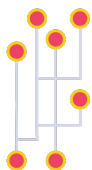
- 1 This School for Autistic Youth Can Cost \$573,200 a Year. It Operates With Little Oversight, and Students Have Suffered.

RACIAL JUSTICE
Imagine if, during the Jim Crow era, a newspaper offered advertisers the option of placing ads only in copies that went to white readers.
That's basically what Facebook is doing nowadays.
The ubiquitous social network not only allows

**MACHINE BIAS**
Investigating Algorithmic Bias



AI Spotlight Series



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Network**



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