Building Trust & Practicing Verification

MOOC Week 1
Building trust
Overview

• Boasts and slogans about accuracy were common as early as 17th century.

• Over time trust has been built with familiarity, frequency, branding.

• Concrete efforts: ethics policies, corrections, ombudsmen, showing our work.
Boasts

“In one thing I yield not to anyone—in the search for truth.”

–Gazette de France (17cen)
“You must grant my claim concerning this book—that it is a book of facts. There are no mistakes in it, no guesses, no surmises; there are no lapses of memory, no inaccuracies. There are only facts.”

—The Brass Check: A Study of American Journalism (1919)
“[Publishers] started producing weekly or biweekly newsheets on sale from a public office where people could come back and say ‘That report doesn’t jibe with reality. They had to try and retain the reader’s confidence.’”
—Stephen Ward, *The Invention of Journalism Ethics*
Familiarity/Presence

**Kapiti News**

**Wednesday, October 16, 2013**

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**MAYOR ELECT**: Boss Church, pictured in his Auto Classics business, with two of his favourite cars, a Jaguar Mark 1 and a Jaguar Mark 2, is Kapiti’s new mayor.

**Church is open, friendly**

DAVID NAUTON

Boss Church was commanding winner in the race for the Kapiti mayoralty. In preliminary results under the single transferable voting system, Mr Church got 7893 votes, followed by K Gurnamuth with 6799 votes, Jenny Reeves 6494 votes, Gavin Wilson 6292 votes, David Scott 5736 votes and Fran Sage 5078 votes.

The five district-wide councillors elected were, in order, Gavin Welch, Mike Cawthry, Hans Arnemond, Jackie Elliot and David Scott. Notable casualties were Roger Bell, who was also mayor, and Peter Ellis, a long time councillor.

Two councillors elected for the Paraparaumu ward were K Gurnamuth and Murray Bell. Notable casualty was Tony Leister, who helped spearhead a number of council projects.

Tony Lloyd Iloha Wallawaka ward councillor again—but only just. He won by two votes over Queentin Poole so he’ll be keeping a close eye on the special vote count. A final vote count is expected today.

Penny Gecker remains the Old Wood ward councillor and John Scott the Napier ward councillor position unchallenged. Mr Church, who has three years in the council for three years, said becoming mayor was very exciting.

“It’s very soulful. He was looking forward to working more closely with the mayor, and forming a strong council team. “He will be fine. I’m looking forward to it.”

Mr Church said his leadership style would be "open and friendly, but determined at the same time".

“If something needs to be argued strongly or told it as it is, I’ll argue for it. If I believe it is right, then I have to be open and friendly and maintain a team atmosphere—gotta say it plain.”

Mr Wilson, who has been mayor for six years, accepted the will of the district.

“The election result shows that in spite of our differences, we’ve managed to take some sections of the community with us—particularly on water issues and canal hazards.”

She was proud of the council’s achievements and legacy and believed she had worked hard and effectively in support of her peers in local government.

“We have worked hard and have acted with integrity and courage to deal with some very big issues—now I know I can look back on this period of my life with great pride. She wished Mr Church and the new council every success.

ParaparaumuNodeType Community Board is Fiona Vining, Kathy Stevens, Debrah Norris-Travers and Jenny Bees.

Wellman Community Board is Eric Gregory, Michael Sweeney, Victor James Westham.

Ngaro Community Board is Jenny Coates, Colin Pearson, Rob Eakins and Christine Fitzpatrick.

ParaparaumuNodeType Community Board is Jack McDonald, Steve Baker, Glen King, and Ngaire Wilson.

Ngaire Wilson remains Kapiti’s representative on the Wellington Regional Council.

Sam Wilson got 874 votes and Turner 876 votes.
Corrections

• 1690: “Nothing shall be entered, but what we have reason to believe is true, repairing to the best fountains for our Information. And when there appears any material mistake in anything that is collected, it shall be corrected in the next.”

The Paradox of Trust

The more willing we are to admit our mistakes and flaws, the more trustworthy we become.
Codes

• “Bureau of Accuracy and Fair Play” at the New York World in 1913.

• 1914: "I have no thought of saying The Associated Press is perfect. The frailties of human nature attach to it…the thing it is striving for is a truthful, unbiased report of the world's happenings … ethical in the highest degree.”

• 1922: American Society of Newspaper Editors first adopts “Canons of Journalism.”

• Emergence of ombudsmen.
Practices

1. Never add anything that was not there.

2. Never deceive the audience.

3. Be transparent about your methods and motives.

4. Rely on your own original reporting.

5. Exercise humility.

Source: The Elements of Journalism
Summary

- Trust has traditionally been built through combination of presence, frequency, practices, etc.

- Barriers to entry in media helped distinguish those able to publish.

- The professionalization of journalism in the 20th century saw a high point of trust, and the creation of standards.
Verification
Overview

• The ritual of verification.

• What it looked like in practice.

• The origins of fact checking.
Journalism’s “essence is a discipline of verification.”

–The Elements of Journalism
• Verification is venerated as a cornerstone of journalism.

• “If your mother tells you she loves you, check it out.”

• But it was not taught systematically.
Verification as a Strategic Ritual

How journalists retrospectively describe processes for ensuring accuracy

Ivor Shapiro, Colette Brin, Isabelle Bédard-Brûlé & Kasia Mychajlowycz

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Abstract

While a concerted quest for accuracy is seen by many journalists as central to their professional identity, informal rules of practice for achieving news accuracy are elusive and highly nuanced. We conducted post hoc qualitative interviews with 28 semi-randomly selected Canadian journalists working for French- and English-language newspapers; each journalist reconstructed in detail the process of verification used in reporting a single newspaper story. Findings suggest considerable diversity in verification strategies, at times mirroring social scientific methods (source triangulation, analysis of primary data sources or official documents, semi-participant observation), and different degrees of reflexivity or critical awareness of journalists' own blind spots and limitations. Most interviewees expressed passionate support for the norm of verification, but described a range of
"Verification might be seen as a 'strategic ritual', as Tuchman (1972) said of the aforementioned (and perhaps now rather old-fashioned) idea of 'objectivity' -- something that legitimizes a journalist’s social role as being demonstrably different from other communicators.”
“Seeking out multiple witnesses, disclosing as much as possible about sources, or asking various sides for comment, all signal such standards. This discipline of verification is what separates journalism from other forms of communication such as propaganda, advertising, fiction, or entertainment.”

–The Elements of Journalism
Fact Checking

- Time magazine started checking in 1923.

- New Yorker in 1927. Soon spread to other big (mostly American) magazines.

- Checkers identified every fact, stat, proper name in an article and reconfirmed it. Contacted all sources quoted.

- Closed system.
“Any bright girl who really applies herself to the handling of the checking problem can have a very pleasant time with it and fill the week with happy moments and memorable occasions”

— Edward Kennedy, Time (1920s)
Verification is a cornerstone of journalism. It helps distinguish journalists from other actors.

It is venerated but is often not taught in a systematic way.

Magazine fact checking was the most systematic practice, but it was not widespread.