

[Trust and verification in an age of misinformation 1.1](#)

Transcript Module 1.1

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Hey everyone! Welcome to Week 1 of our MOOC. I'm so happy that you signed up.

This is an important week, kind of a foundation week in a certain way. We are going to look at the way journalists have traditionally build trust and practice verification. And let's start and dive right in.

Let's talk about how journalist and journalistic organizations have traditionally built trust.

So here's a quick little overview of some of the things we are going to talk about:

Early newspapers which are generally agreed just started roughly the 17th century. We're going to look at early language of those and other early journalist and journalism organizations.

And look at how they started boasting about the ,you know, 'why they deserve trust'. Before they were actually doing things to earn it.

Second thing we're going to talk about is how it's been built over time. We're gonna talk about things like you know the frequency of a newspaper everyday or every week, a radio broadcast, a TV broadcast, how that frequency was really important and also the presence in the community. It's really important as trust-building and over time you built that brand that became trusted.

The last thing I want to talk about our concrete efforts to build trust. Corrections, ethics policies, the hiring of Ombudsman, these were all really important pieces that help build trust over time. And then as we get we talk you know in subsequent weeks about where we are today in terms the information environment you're gonna see how some of these things are still really important, some of them have really changed and we have to think about maybe new trust signals in some ways.

So let's talk about those boasts...

This is from a French newspaper, an early French newspaper 17th century published by, in many cases, someone that people consider to be the Godfather of French journalism and in one of his editions he wrote:

"In one thing I yield not to anyone - in the search for truth"

Now the context here is important. At this point there was really no one called a journalist that didn't come till later. There were no really set practices or standards for what would go into one of these really early newspapers. They would gather stuff from people in the community, maybe a ship arrives with newspapers from another country, they'd grab some of those stories that reprint them. There's no real news gathering there's no verification, so what they're doing in the absence of that actual foundation to earn trust of, you know a professional foundation, they just kind of boast about it. And this goes on for a while even in a more modern example here - this is from the foreword of a book, an important book called "The Brass Check a Study of American Journalism", published in 1919, written by Upton Sinclair. And here's what he wrote:

"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."

Now we're gonna talk about Corrections in a second. The truth is that we all make mistakes. As human beings, but also as human beings practicing journalism we all make mistakes. So you can't really write a whole book and insist that I haven't done anything wrong. I've made no guesses, no surmises, that's not really - I mean that's what we should aspire to - but it's pretty difficult to achieve. So in this case again it's a 'hey you need to trust this book because it's perfect and it's all facts'. And these boasts, you know, at a certain point we need to start backing them up.

So what's one of the reasons we needed to start backing them up? Well, as we started to create frequency, so a newspaper every day or week, a radio broadcast going around the clock, TV stations, etc., etc., the presence in the community, the presence of coming back again and again, even the physical presence of an office really required us to start thinking about how do we not only boast about why you should trust us, but you know 'what's our work product look like?'

Here's a quote from Stephen Ward, who wrote a great book called the invention of journalism ethics he told me that, you know, publishers started producing weekly or bi-weekly news sheets - so this is back again 17th century. They were on sale from a public office where people could come back and say 'that report doesn't jive with reality', so these publishers had to try and retain the reader's confidence. They had to build trust.

Now that presence and that frequency is, as I mentioned, really important. Here's an image of just kind of a random local newspaper I picked, writing about you know a church in the area.

Not huge news, but something local, interviewing people, journalists in that community, living there, going out and being there at events. Being part of the community, having the presence, that familiarity. That is a very powerful builder of trust. People see you as one of them. And the difficulty of the local news is having in some places around the world is really starting to strain

that trust. And the other piece of course is that, now we have the ability to access information from around the and not only getting it from a local source means we're getting it from places we may not have as much of a connection to.

So we'll get into that a little bit more but again familiarity and presence were really important trust building things.

Also, also getting to our concrete areas.

Corrections - hugely important!

So, the the foundation of a correction, what I call the contract of correction that journalists have had with the public for hundreds of years, is that we're gonna do everything we can to gather information that is accurate, to present information that is accurate, kind of aspire to what Upton St. Clair boasted about in his book.

But, we know we're human, we know we will make mistakes and so we commit to to correcting those mistakes publicly. And this is a tradition, which I'll get into with these dates in a second, but it's it's basically us saying 'we're gonna do everything we can to get it right but when we get it wrong we're gonna publicly admit our errors, we're gonna promote our mistakes.

And this was a part of trust building to say that, you know, we're doing our best but we're also gonna be open and transparent about our mistakes. And this is a tradition in journalism that actually goes back a really long time.

So in 1690, the person who ended up founding what would later become the first newspaper of what would later become the United States, he wrote in a prospectus of proposal for his newspaper saying that nothing that is entered, will be anything that but we have reason to believe is true. And when there appears any material mistake, in anything that is collected, it shall be corrected in the next. So he's saying if we get something wrong, the next edition we published we will correct it.

This is in 1690 very early on and the next date I put up here is 1972. And this is a really important moment in corrections for a long time. You had corrections in newspapers (pretty much primarily newspapers), but they were spread throughout the editions they were written in different ways. One section of one newspaper would write it one way, in another section in that same newspaper might actually put corrections in a different place and write them different way.

So they weren't standardized, even though they were really important as a trust-building thing, but in 1972 the New York Times decides 'let's put them all on the inside page of the cover. Let's write them in a style let's have them uniform'. And this actually caused a lot of American newspapers to follow that lead.

So corrections don't exist in media everywhere around the world, it is a tradition that really took hold very much in the United States and has spread in a lot of English-language media, but you will find in many countries around the world where they are publishing Corrections and newspapers where they are doing it now on websites, in news broadcasts and radio broadcasts. And it's important. One of the interesting things about corrections is that at the core of it is what I call the paradox of trust. The more willing that we are to admit our mistakes and flaws, the more trustworthy we become.

This isn't really just about journalism. And this is an important thread throughout everything just about journalism and this is an important thread throughout everything we're going to talk about in the MOOC. This is about being a good human, this is about basic human interaction.

If I'm friends with someone and that person never admits a mistake, never apologizes never acknowledges really their basic humanity of being flawed in some ways, I'm not going to trust that person. It's the same for journalists. So corrections are actually very powerful because of this basic human dynamic.

Another concrete thing that journalists and journalism organizations have used over time to kind of express why they should earn your trust our ethics codes. So really these these weren't a very foundational thing in journalism until we get into the early 20th century, where we start to see things like this Bureau of Accuracy and Fair Play at the New York World.

New York World was a newspaper that was known for being pretty loose with the facts, but as the turn of the century happened they really started to try and commit. And in this case if people felt that something was wrong, that had been printed this Bureau of Accuracy and Fair Play would look into it. So there was kind of a code of being accountable.

And then in 1914 and 1922, we see a couple of journalistic codes of standards published, so The Associated Press published as its in 1914 about striving for a truthful unbiased report of the world's happenings. This was to set out why they are trustworthy and why they are professional and why they deserve your attention.

Trust American Society of newspaper editors adopt something called the canons of journalism about accuracy and truth and all of these things. And we also see at a certain point, the emergence of jobs within newsrooms, primarily newspapers of people whose job it is to respond to reader concerns and complaints, and to also hold the newsroom accountable for them.

So all of these things, they're really about accountability, they're about transparency, they're about admitting and acknowledging our mistakes, and they're about also the professionalization of journalism, about journalists being a respectable profession. For a long time we weren't really considered respectable or a profession.

But as the 20th century happened in the United States, there's a lot of these efforts and at the core of them they're really trust-building efforts. These are the things we use to try and build the trust of the audience. Now, in terms of concrete practices, there's a wonderful book that we'll talk about more in the verification section next called "The Elements of Journalism". And they outline a few core practices, that I think these practices all really go to us trying to build trust on a daily basis. Never add anything that was not there.

So that's an important thing never deceived the audience, be transparent about your methods and motives rely on your own original reporting and exercise humility.

I think these five things are really, if you think about the basic actions that journalists take on a daily basis to help build make and make their work worthy of trust. This is a really great summary of those.

All right speaking of summaries, this is the last part of this first lesson for week 1.

So - what have we learned? Well, we've learned that trust for journalists and journalism organizations has traditionally been built through a combination of presence, frequency, practices, policies. There's a mixture of kind of things that we're declaring and things that were actually doing. But in the early days it was really about declarations with not a lot to back them up.

The other piece, that presents peace and the frequency piece is that it was it was really it took a lot of money and you had to be able to run an ongoing business. You needed capital and labor at all these things to be able to run a media organization, to be able to publish a broadcast. So that actually created a lot of distinctions and just the presence and the the continued presence and frequency within a community was also something that really did build trust over time.

You can lose that trust, even if you were still there, but it really helped you that you were distinguished by being one of only a few people who were doing this particular activity.

Then the last thing that we talked about is the professionalization of journalism the 20th century, creation of codes, the elevation of the perception of the profession and really trying to codify and make clear what it is that distinguishes us. That makes us a profession and that makes us worthy of trust.

Alright, so that is our first section here in week one. We're gonna move on next in the next video and talk about how journalists have traditionally practiced verification.

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