Trust and verification in an age of misinformation Module 4.1

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Craig Silverman: Hey everyone welcome to week 4 it is sadly the last week of the MOOC. I hope you've really been enjoying it. I hope you've been learning a lot. and enjoying engaging with your other students in the forum's answering the questions doing the quizzes. I've been really enjoying reading all of your responses, thank you so much. And also thanks to the people who have been helping you know share additional laying share additional material. It's really been great to see students helping each other out.

So this week our last week, we're kind of returning to themes that we talked about very early on in the course trust and transparency. But we're gonna place them in the context of today's media environment. So let's talk about what we're gonna look at today. In this first video we're gonna talk about the principles around building trust and transparency in this environment. And we're gonna talk about some really interesting projects that have emerged in journalism to try and help individual reporters but also news organizations do a better job of building and maintaining trust.

Three three key areas we're gonna look at in this particular video. One just an overview of trust and transparency and you're going to notice that some of the things remain the same as much as things have changed. Some of the core principles don't at all and that's important to always keep in mind. We will talk about the the new dynamics of trust in today's environment. Some of the pros and cons to keep in mind as you're out there trying to build and earn trust. The last thing as I mentioned there's some really interesting projects in journalism right now people are really trying to figure out how do we build and maintain trust in today's information environment. There's three projects I'm going to highlight that all have really concrete steps and approaches that you might be able to apply.

So this slide should look familiar here to remember this from very early on in the course. This is the list of kind of principles and practices for doing good journalism, but I think also for doing trustworthy journalism. It's from that great book the elements of journalism. I give you an excerpt from that in your readings previously, I do recommend you pick up the book if that's possible for you it's really short but very powerful. And so what do we got here? We got five things: never add anything that was not there, never deceived the audience, be transparent about you methods and motives, which is something we're really going to dig in on rely on your own original reporting, and the last

one exercise humility. Also really important and also something we're gonna touch on this week. When we think about trust we really have to think about how humans build trust and humility and a transparency and accountability are all things that help us build trust in individual humans. It's the same for journalism. A couple of quotes I just want to highlight to frame what we're thinking about again. This one from a Los Angeles Times editor. "transparency is telling people how we got the story reporting why we included what we did what was left out and why who our sources are." I think this is just a great really powerful statement of the things you want to keep in mind. And we have some examples in in the next video of really how you do this in practice. This other quote I think is is really important you know in today's mean environment. This is a quote from melodie Kramer who's a former journalist. She now works at the Wikimedia Foundation and also writes a column about local news for the Pointer Institute. She said that "it's a challenge to figure out the veracity of the information where it came from, what the point of view is, or how it was put together." That creates more of an imperative for news organizations to pull back the curtain explain to readers how the report and write stories. She has another quote here "it becomes incumbent upon organizations that are trying to prove our lower-d democracy which is something we care about it's journalists to open up a window into how they do the work they do."

So this piece of transparency, at the fundamental conversation around trust a lot of people really start talking about transparency. This does relate to how humans build trust as well. If you are someone who is willing to admit mistakes, as we talked about before, may be a little bit more likely to trust you because I think you're being open and transparent. If you think you're always right if you never describe how you've come to a point of view or how you got a piece of information, how can I really build that get those building blocks to establish trust with you. So things to keep in mind. Let's talk about the pros and cons of today's media environment. So starting on on the pro side you know platforms have really changed. Sorry let me actually start with the cons, with some of the challenges aside. So platforms have changed the direct relationship that news organizations have with their audience. This is absolutely a challenge for us. It's the fact that people are getting a lot of information from Google searches, from going on Facebook, from looking at Twitter or what-have-you some folks of course still subscribing or going to specific news websites. But there's been that this new middleman that we talked about there change the distribution element of it. And so people have in some cases a less direct relationship with you and with your news organization. So that's really a different kind of thing whereas before because you were maybe the only newspaper or one of two in the market they would choose and they would you know stick with you and become you know a certain type of family, well we're a post family or were a times family. Today you know somebody might actually be

getting a lot of their news through social media and they're not really aware of the brands. The second thing of course is that challenge is the press is under attack from other institutions. I'm thinking in some countries now you have you know the executive branch of the government who is constantly going after the press, constantly kind of attacking them and criticizing them and trying to deal with generalize them.

(5:40) And I think one of the one of the challenges of this is that there's an element of almost cognitive dissonance for people is that they're trying to to process two conflicting things. Typically to major institutions of a democracy the the executive or the government branch and the press. Yes there is at times conflict but you don't usually have one completely trying to tear down the other. I think that that is difficult for people to process because they feel like they almost have to take sides whereas before they should be seeing these two interacting and around basic democratic norms but also certainly holding each other accountable. Then the last thing is that the the rise of a new breed of partisan online media can create "I trust it because I agree with it" scenario. This is something that we see not just the United States but in other countries where by social media has really enabled very hyper partisan media to grow. There's nothing wrong with partisan media, there's nothing wrong with being clear about coming from point-of-view that's often a really good thing. But in a lot of cases these new entities are really just about appealing to people's most basic partisan views demonizing the other side, collapsing that middle ground for conversation. In the middle where we can agree on facts and then disagree about how to interpret them and disagree about policy and disagree about the world. That's all really great and important and fruitful in a democracy.Those are challenges to building trust because people might end up trusting more information and trusting outlets more. They're really just cater their point of view and don't challenge them and how do you break through that. But we do have some pros. Alll right so the first thing is that even though you know brands maybe have a challenge because these new entities have kind of come in between them in the audience, individual journalists on social media are able to actually correct, connect directly with people. We're gonna have some examples of how to do that. On the web in the online world make it easier to cite sources and show our work that's great! It was hard to kind of go into your whole methodology, you couldn't put links in a newspaper story you would cite the source but you couldn't direct people to it. So we have an environment that does enable us to actually kind of create these building blocks of trust by showing our work in a more interactive way. It does make it easier to collaborate with people and build a connection. We're gonna have some examples about that in the next video and there are new opportunities to use technology to determine trustworthy content and to elevator. What do I mean by that well it's actually a perfect segue into looking at some of these projects I talked about.

So the first one is called the trust project and this is a project that has a bunch of news organizations collaborating. There are also some technology companies involved, but at the core of it you know this is about creating signals to the reader as they're going and reading content. At this point it really is a little more kind of words focused rather than broadcast or radio and creating signals and guides for readers to kind of understand this information, where it came from, why they might want to trust it. So some examples here of the things that they're focused on right now. They've done some surveys, they've been working with newsrooms. So they started with set of eight trust indicators. They call them being implemented by places like the Washington Post or Mike calm and so. For example, news organizations that are participating in this have to actually make it clear somewhere on their site what their editorial standards are, where they get their funding, what their mission is and the kinds of commitments to ethics that they have. So actually declaring here's who we are here's, how we're funded, here's what our values are, making that easy for people to find is something that a lot of the really marginal places that are sort of pretending to be news and journalism don't do. More information about journalists more transparent about who you, are where you came from, how you were educated is a piece that's in there. Then we also see things like for in-depth stories information about why reporters chose to pursue a story and how they went about. The process we're gonna look at a great example from the Washington Post in the next video on that. So these eight principles here, these eight trust indicators are things that all the people participating in this have to make sure is present in their work. At the core of it you can see a lot of it is more opening up and helping people understand why are we doing this, who are we, what do we value and what is this story trying to do. Really good basic things right. Okay, the other piece is that they also did a really big survey of journalists to kind of figure out some of the other types of indicators. So as you saw on the so on the previous slide they had over 70 indicators they came up with. They've chosen to put in 8 but I thought this was a neat kind of list here to sort of see. You can get to this from their website, they have it set up in Trello, which is kind of a collaboration and and project management platform. You can see other ideas that they have here. On on one column there you have the proposed tools and features. A GPS location app that shows relevant local stories and friends, provide a new source or topic each day, a tool to identify new sources or voices on a topic of interest. Try to diversify the voices that are being brought in. So this is like a window into their brainstorm of things that maybe we can be doing and things that they might roll out in the future.

Second one, called the credibility coalition. So this is one where there actually trying to think about standards on the web as they relate to trust and transparency. So for example, could a search engine learn some of the that there is an editorial standards

page up on a website and factor that into its results? could a search engine see that an article comes with a detailed bio of an of a journalist and that there may be a member of a professional organization? So this is actually thinking about how we encode trust into signals that search engines social media networks could look at and help elevate content based on these trust indicators. So they're really working at the standards level of the worldwide web to try and create things that everyone could implement. That different platforms could choose to recognize and also include in determining do I show this? versus do I show that? and so that's kind of an interesting technical level project.

The next one, the last one which is being run by our guest speaker this week joy Mayer is called the trusting news project. This is all about, as they say, helping journalists or in consumers trust. They've done you know some of the stats here impressive, these done eight thousand seven hundred and twenty eight user questionnaires and eighty-one in-depth interviews conducted in 2017 by journalists and newsrooms. So they actually had journalists talking to their readers to their audience, understanding things better. What a what a simple but powerful idea to have reporters you know going out and gathering information about their audience to understand them better. And so they're testing some things. I want to give you two examples here.

So one you know a theme that they have here is to engage authentically with the audience which we've talked about. In this case we have somebody who who put a post on a Facebook page of a newspaper who basically said "no no this is this what you have here is not true" and then the newspaper replied, you can see, there "yes it is true" They explain why it's true, and you can also see that someone else added a comment underneath that sort of thanking them and reinforcing them. This was a good thing that they interacted. So a lot of times you hear journalists say "don't read the comments" I disagree, I think you should be reading the comments. I think you should be engaging especially on social media.

Last one here is just they came up with an idea of putting out a call saying "hey what are you curious about here in our community" on the theme here is sharing value with your content. So how can you actually put out a call get people to ask questions answer, those questions and deliver value in a really direct way.

So those are three projects that I think are really interesting and you can track those as they develop.

To quickly summarize what we've talked about in this video, I think it's really important to understand that a lot has changed, but a lot remains the same. Human trust and

connection fundamental values and principles of journalism still matter. Our new media environment has a lot of challenges and opportunities for sure. I think the the main thing to take about this is to understand these pros and cons and kind of figure out well how do I how do I then embrace this and how do I operate in this environment.Next video very much all about that. I think these new initiatives are great, but they are really about reinforcing and making more visible basic good journalistic practices so you still have to do the work. And then the final thing is that in our discussion forums people have kind of talked about the power of Corrections and how admitting your mistakes makes you more worthy of trust, but some people have rightly pointed out that in today's media environment you have news organizations being responsible and admitting mistakes and then really being called out for that and said see you can't trust them. And people are trying to almost weaponize Corrections and reverse their impact of that trust building element here. A really simple piece of guidance I want to give you on that is that absolutely it's it's a challenge we're seeing but the answer is not to abandon our principles and our values in the face of criticism. I think it's actually to double down on these things and be more transparent and demonstrate even more in our work, why we are being accountable and that is all about what the next video is.

So thanks very much for checking this one out and let's move on to look at some concrete examples and strategies.

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