

Is That Really True?

How Disinformation Dangerously
Impacts Our Thinking

Rand Morimoto, Ph.D.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to seeking the truth in all that we fill our minds with, to prevent ourselves from being fooled by others, so we can make proper decisions based on fact and reality

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OPENING THOUGHTS

A couple decades ago, a former boss of mine changed the way I spoke about things. The first time I used the words “most people” or “the majority of people”, she stopped me in my tracks and said, “prove it”. As a University academic and a high-ranking political official, she wanted the experts surrounding her to only speak with factual statements. Every generalization had to be backed with cited data to support a statement. I thought she was a tough person to work for, but after a couple months preparing myself for every meeting with her, I found it comforting to know that I was filling my brain with facts so that I could speak authoritatively to her and anyone with validated information.

As the Internet era has evolved, and social media and Internet news is the basis of the information any of us connected to the Internet have in front of us, every week that goes on, I’m challenged with finding the truth and the facts from the information in front of me.

This is why I’ve written this book, as an attempt to help others build filters so that what they hear or read is not immediately accepted as the truth, but is very likely just one person’s opinion that has been repeated and amplified many times across multiple venues to appear to be fact.

Don’t be fooled by everything you read, arm yourself with knowledge and skill to discern fact from fiction.



1 THE "INFORMATION" PROBLEM IN TODAY'S SOCIETY

There are many variations of quotes in English literature that “too much of a good thing is bad,” and information on the Internet may be one of those things where with all that is out on the Internet, not all of it is good information.

We Marveled at Instantaneous Information

In the early days of Internet news, we lauded at the benefit of instantaneous information, having access to news and firsthand accounts anywhere anytime. Rather than waiting until the morning newspaper or the 6pm TV news broadcast, we were getting pictures and storyline snippets as the news was happening. The Internet, with social media apps like Twitter and Facebook, made the world seem so much smaller thanks to instantaneous access to real time information.

The Internet as a Source of Disinformation

In just a few short years, what made the Internet a breakthrough in real-time information sharing has become a medium for disinformation. Whether purposely manipulated to advance a message and agenda, or a simple opinion that wrongly gets amplified to be accepted as fact, the result is that “information” out on the Internet these days may be far from the truth. There are no Internet police checking facts and accuracy of information shared on the Internet, and it is up to each individual to filter what they read or watch on the Internet to determine the validity of the information available. And most certainly it is extremely important for individuals to do a little due diligence on fact checking before making any critical decisions or alter one’s thinking based on solely what was read or seen off the Internet.

News as it was Decades Ago vs Today’s Social Media Accounts

A generation ago, it took hours or days for information to land on the pages of a newspaper or on the 6pm news, and in that time, facts were able to be gathered to formulate the final story. Today, anyone with a mobile phone and a Twitter, Instagram, or Reddit account becomes a global reporter. Unfortunately Facebook reports as much as 5% of their accounts are fake per their own 2019 Community Standards Enforcement Report - <https://transparency.facebook.com/community-standards-enforcement#fake-accounts> With an estimated 2.5-billion active Facebook accounts, that means over 250-million accounts on Facebook are fake. Considering only four countries in the world have a total population of more than 250-million inhabitants (China, India, United States, and Indonesia), the number of fake accounts on Facebook EXCEEDS the total population of every country on Earth except these 4 nations. The 2019 Community Standards Enforcement Report continues on that Facebook takes action on 1.5-2 billion accounts each quarter, which should be alarming to anyone who thinks they should trust who they think they’re “talking with” on the Internet.

Posts and Comments as Opinions, Not Fact

When one reads a post or reads the comments on a post, the reader is led to believe the information is true, they may in fact be filling their thinking with information purposely made up to manipulate and influence their thinking. If an individual believes what they read and then the disinformation is repeated (or re-Tweeted) that incorrect “information” may eventually sounds and seem real. The more times we read or hear the same information especially when it comes from multiple sources (“news” articles, videos, conversations with a friends, Tweets from celebrities or politicians), the more

we begin to believe what we've heard to be true.

Gaining Control of Fact versus Fiction

Unless we want to immerse ourselves in disinformation and potentially make critical life or business decisions based on potentially inaccurate information, we need to put proper filters on the input of information we receive. We should only make critical decisions when we have successfully validated what we've read or heard to confirm the information is factually true. We need to constantly remind ourselves that everything we hear or read is purely opinion until we can personally check sources to confirm the validity of the information.

The better skilled we are at tuning our filters for real information, the better we will be able to make critical decisions that impact our lives and that of those we care about in a world of reality, not influenced or purposely manipulated in thinking and making inaccurate decisions.



2 WHAT ARE FACTS AND WHAT IS PRIMARY SOURCE INFORMATION?

To be better prepared in making decisions based on facts, we need to know what facts are and discern primary source information that helps us formulate our thinking. The Merriam Webster Dictionary definition of a Fact is:

- 1 a : something that has actual existence
// space exploration is now a fact
- b : an actual occurrence
// prove the fact of damage
- 2 : a piece of information presented as having objective reality
// These are the hard facts of the case.
- 3 : the quality of being actual : actuality
// a question of fact hinges on evidence

The Importance of Primary Source Information

The first thing we look for when trying to determine the degree of accuracy of information is whether the information is “primary source.”

Various types of primary sources of information include:

- Eyewitness accounts from credible witnesses
- Original (unedited) print material (books, magazines, newspaper articles)
- Data gathered by the primary researcher
- Unaltered photographs of an actual event or location

You’re looking for the original information, not that all primary source information is immediately accurate (more on that in the next section), but START with primary source information that you can then question and validate.

If the information you’re working from is secondhand knowledge (someone heard it from a friend, someone read it in an article), you’re already getting the facts that have been filtered through at least one level of someone’s interpretation. A book that has been translated from one language to another is also a form of secondary source information as translations frequently go through some form of interpretation by the translator.

Validating Primary Source Information

Once you have your primary source information, just like any courtroom scene you may have watched on TV or in a movie, the attorneys question the witnesses and experts to try to prove (or disprove) that the witness is credible or not. Just because a person was at a scene of an incident doesn’t mean they actually saw what happened. Someone who walks up to an accident 5-minutes after it occurred can tell you what they saw as a result of the accident, but they are not a credible witness of the accident themselves as they were not there when the accident occurred. Even someone who saw an accident occur can be credible in explaining what they saw, but they are not an expert in explaining what was going on in the minds of the individuals involved in the accident itself. While that witness could give their opinion of what they think the person was thinking or doing, they’re not the person themselves, and thus can only provide their perspective.

In written text, we use citations to direct readers to specific materials where we found the source information. If we quote a passage in a book, there is a note that tells what book we gathered the information from, when the book was published, and the specific page(s) that we found the

information. The citation allows a reader to drill into the materials cited to potentially allow the reader to read more of the original cited source, or the citation can be used to qualify the strength of the source materials (in the case where the cited material turns out to be secondhand accounts or opinions).

A couple years ago, I was preparing for a presentation on academics and kept coming across statements that “65% of all first graders will be in jobs when they grow up that haven’t been invented yet”. It was a pretty bold statement that I questioned the accuracy of the data, and a statistics that was quoted by government leaders, business executives, and those throughout the academic community, but I wanted to find the research that derived this 65% number. What I found was most of the use of the statistic were never cited, meaning people quoted it but never bothered to check whether it was accurate.

Those who did use some citation typically quoted sources that circularly referenced the other (source A cited source B that cited source C that cited source A). I ended up writing an entire blog post of my research on the matter (<http://randsnet.blogspot.com/2018/02/65-of-future-jobs-not-invented-yet.html>). Bottomline, even when someone has citations and the sources sound legitimate, you have to dig into the accuracy of the information to directly find the primary source (if it exists). In the case of my research on this data, there was no study that quantified 65% of anything, and all sources led to nowhere.

I questioned the validity and accuracy of the source data, and I confirmed there was no validity to quotes on the matter.

Understanding Peer Reviewed Research

In the world of academics, research work performed by highly qualified and credentialed academics (typically Ph.D. researchers), there is a rigor that the academic community goes through to validate their work that is called peer reviewed research. Academic researchers conduct their studies using primary source data, self-validate the accuracy of the information the best they can, document step by step procedures on how they derived at their findings, cite any materials with as much background as they can gather, and minimize the influence of opinion in their materials to provide as accurate of firsthand research that they can produce.

Once the research materials have been derived, other researchers will be asked to validate the work in what is called a peer review. Citations are checked to validate that what was quoted goes back to the actual source materials and are quoted accurately. Cited materials are reviewed for their

authenticity so that key source materials are not opinions, translations, or potentially unreliable secondary source materials. In work that involves lab work, an independent lab test may be run in a different lab with the exact same parameters to see if the results are the same.

In peer reviewed work, the reputation of the researcher is on the line to ensure their research is accurate and not proven to be biased, inaccurate, not repeatable, or invalid. The reputation of the person doing the peer review is also on the line as they are certifying that the original work by the original researcher is accurate. If the research is proven faulty at a later date, the academic research integrity of both the researcher and the person who did the peer review are questioned by peers. It may be difficult for the individuals to get a job on a team for a credible research organization, or get promoted to a higher position in academics if they've produced questionable research work in the past.

True academic peer reviewed research meets a high bar in terms of accuracy of information, not to say that it is always 100% accurate and factual, but in comparison to news worthy Tweets today of something someone heard from a friend who read a comment on some blog post, academic peer reviewed research creates a distinction of the degree of information accuracy worthy of consideration whether what you read today really is true and accurate or not.

Are Surveys and Polls Accurate Sources of Information

As we dissect information to determine the degree of accuracy and validity of information, in many news sources today we find a heavy use of surveys and polls. While the data that comes from surveys and polls can very well be accurate quantified data, the resulting information can be misleading and manipulated in interpretation, and it is up to the reader to assess the validity of the information.

An example of a survey that can be deemed relatively accurate is how many paid ticket passengers fly on Southwest Airlines non-stop between Los Angeles and San Francisco on Mondays in the month of April. Southwest Airlines can capture the data from their ticketing system and provide the data, it is a measurable and auditable number. Someone could dig into that data and may adjust that number +/- a little by adding or subtracting tickets paid for using Award Points, or tickets purchased but weren't used, but in general the number is the number.

Where surveys go wrong is when someone adds in their opinion or interpretation to the data, by saying Monday is ALWAYS the busiest travel

day of the week. While that may or may not be true, if all the person gathered was data for travel on Monday between two cities on one airline, one cannot create a deduction of a comparison without actually gathering data for the rest of the week and doing a comparison. Also, creating an assumption on just the month of April and imply that is true all year long is also making a huge assumption and creating an inaccurate statement. One month is just one month of data. To more accurately make a statement that Monday is the busiest day of the week, if the researcher looked at data for an entire year, they may find Monday was busiest in April during a Spring Break month, but that might not hold true all year long.

Polling data can also have biases that needs to be reviewed and assessed. A poll focused about weather and temperature conducted with Eskimos in the arctic will likely be very different than the same poll focused about weather and temperature conducted to city dwellers in Saharan Africa. Or a poll solely focused on conservative Republicans in America may not be the most accurate representation of what ALL Americans think or believe.

Yet we see poll data, percentages quoted, articles written that imply one thing or another based on "recent polls" without providing background on WHO was polled, WHAT question(s) were they asked, and how were their answers interpreted.

If we take survey and polling data and apply the same validation and verification process as we do peer reviewed research, we should dig into the data more to determine if the information was biased, interpreted (or misinterpreted) by someone in the process, and if we ran the poll multiple times, would we still yield the same or similar results. When we can run the poll and survey through various tests, we can feel the results and interpretation are accurate. However, if we don't question and qualify the data and interpretation, then polling/survey data is no different than any other option shared on the Internet, it just "sounds" fancier.



3 WHO'S AN EXPERT (AND WHO IS NOT)?

One way of helping us identify factual information is to clearly understand who's an expert, and who is not an expert. Not that experts are always right, as many times even experts are swayed into taking a position on a topic or their information is used in a deceiving manner. However, beginning with who is NOT an expert is a good place to start. Someone who has no deep knowledge and expertise in a given subject merely has their opinions or their perception. A handful of things here to think about.

Primary Source Researchers as Experts

As covered in the first chapter in this book, primary source materials are important to work from, it's a good starting point of firsthand information. As such, those who are creating primary source materials, or working firsthand in the field with primary source information have more credibility than those who simply read an article or attended a lecture by just anyone on the topic.

In lab work, the person who is in the lab, creating and personally walking

through test procedures, and working directly with the resulting data have seen and know the information firsthand. The challenge with researchers that have assistants doing lab work for them is the researcher is putting their reputation on the line in trusting that their lab assistant is following procedures accurately and gathering data in a methodical manner.

Those who have completed primary source research, written up their findings, cited the source(s) of their information, and have had their research validated by peers are more likely trusted as experts in the work they've done research on than others

Being There Doesn't Make you an Expert

As has been shared earlier in this book, an individual who saw an event happen is not an expert, they are merely an observer. The observer can share their perception and experience, but only as a bystander. Eyewitnesses have different perspectives. An animal activist seeing a chicken killed would be horrified and would likely share a perspective of loss, grief, and possibly outrage. A chicken breeder would see the killing of a chicken as part of daily life and part of business, done so to serve buyers and consumers, and a way of making a living. An identical event can be relayed in a quote from two individuals in completely different ways. One might say a tragedy just occurred, when the person next to them would say the normal course of life just occurred.

The interpretations and the account of the event are very different, and as a reader, we have to remember that WHAT is shared with us will likely be influenced by WHO shared the information. If all that was shared with us was a quote from one or the other of these individuals, we will walk away thinking a tragedy just occurred (or not). If we then relayed what we heard about an event now second and third hand, how we relay the event to others will no doubt be drastically different two or three interpretations later.

What You Remember Isn't Always What You Saw

Studies have also shown that what you remember isn't always what you saw. That your memories can be rewritten and changed, leading you to believe you saw something that actually never happened. Researchers call this "memory distortion." An article written by Robby Berman explains this phenomena: <https://bigthink.com/robby-berman/the-reason-youre-sure-you-remember-something-that-never-happened>

Our false memories are warped though the use of "lure words." We might have seen a robbery occur, so we're a firsthand witness. However, if

someone says “wow, that was some gnarly scare the guy had on his forehead, and I’ve never seen anyone with such big hands.” If we were asked to describe the person later, we may likely recall that the person had a gnarly scar on their forehead and big hands. These lure words after an event can subconsciously rewrite our memory. We would testify in a court of law of what we believe to be a factual recollection, when in fact our memory may have been influenced and altered.

This is the risk of depending on a single eyewitness in a court case. There’s also a risk of asking 10 eyewitnesses for their recollection if all 10 were in the same proximity where lure words were used that influenced the memories of all 10 witnesses. There’s also the challenge where if 8 eyewitnesses are influenced by memory distortion, that 2 eyewitnesses who recollect something different may be influenced by others thinking that if 8 people are adamant they saw something, then I might be wrong in what I saw, so I’ll just say what they said.

A Successful Athlete Isn’t an Expert on Everything Sports Related

Television and streaming broadcasts are packed with pre- and post- sports event shows littered with former coaches and players sharing their “expertise” about a sports event. While a coach or athlete may have insight as a coach or player based on THEIR experience, an athlete wouldn’t know what it’s like to own or manage a sports franchise, nor would that athlete know how every position on a sports team is played. They also have no way of knowing what every athlete on a playing field is thinking, yet week after week, hours of programming is dedicated to these “experts” sharing what they “know” is going on in the minds of the coaches and player.

We have to remember that these experts are solely experts in their own experience. They know firsthand what they were thinking, what they did, and how they did what they did. They can share how they perceive they became successful. But we have to take this as sports entertainment, sitting around listening to insight from sports heroes we watched on the court or on the field of play for years. Since there are many avenues to success, and since situations are different each and every time, these sports commentators are merely entertaining narrators of an event.

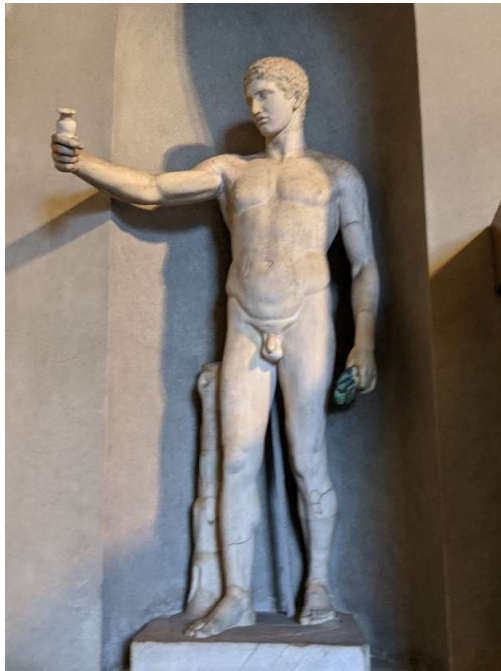
A Celebrity is not an Expert in all Worldly Things

Whether a reality T.V. star, musician, actor/actress, or social media influencer, these individuals can ONLY tell you what they did to reach their level of success or fame. They’re not experts in politics, climate change,

animal rights, or current events. They no doubt have “their opinion” or “their perspective” and they may be passionate at what they speak of, however their role doesn’t make them an expert.

With thousands and sometimes millions of followers on social media platforms, these celebrities post comments or statements on matters, however as we’ve covered so far in this book, their accounts are likely not primary source materials, especially when they are commenting or repeating something happening thousands of miles away from them. The commentary is based on the perspective of firsthand eyewitnesses, so their interpretation is influenced by what the originator perceived. And their commentary is biased based on their own personal interpretation.

When it comes to the validity and accuracy of source information, celebrity Tweets are far from accurate sources of information, so we have to be careful how we interpret, react, respond, and internalize the information.



4 THE BUSINESS AND MOTIVATION OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE

Being a part of the “news” or “information” media stream has financial benefits. To share information, accurate or not, “pays.” Additionally, being a part of the social media stream is being part of the new era of news and information sharing. To be a part of mainstream media brings along the potential of fame, stardom, and social acceptance that motivates individuals to “do more of it”. For others, participating in social media is solely to keep a foot in door.

Why are Athletes and Celebrities “Experts”?

In the last chapter, we mentioned sport coaches, athletes, and celebrities as modern day reporters of news and information that is filled with opinions, individual perspectives, and are low in the likelihood of factual accuracy, but

why do we listen to them? These individuals are prevalent in current mainstream communications because people around the world “follow” these individuals. Streaming media producers and media advertisers pay them because of the world of “likes” and “followers” that we live in. When there’s money being made, opinions become financial gains for many.

What Makes Social Media Influencers Successful?

Many social media influencers earn their living posting materials on the Internet. Some do silly stunts to gain viewers. The more viewers and “likes”, the more a social media influencer can potentially earn. But many of these social media influencers die from their stunts just because they wanted attention. Every few months we will read about some social media influencer who fell off a cliff trying to take a picture, of they fell off the roof of a building while doing cartwheels on the ledge of the building.

Someone who sits around and lives a boring life likely won’t get a lot of “likes” and followers. So, the race is on for social media influencers to do outrageous stunts that gain the attention of viewers that likely will gain the individual more viewers, more followers, and more “likes”.

Keeping Relevant

Two or three generations ago, a movie star was clearly an actor or actress on the big screen or on television that was recognizable from their role in a movie or TV show. However, in this era of social media influencers, Internet fame is now grabbing a slice of attention of viewers and thus advertising money.

Traditional Hollywood actors and actresses have to compete with YouTube and Instagram celebrities, and thus there’s a competition to bring attention to themselves and make sure they remain 'in the news' to keep their relevance in the industry, with promoters, and with advertisers.

All of these celebrities have to keep posting, Tweeting, doing outlandish things whether it’s posting near nude photos, showing off wealth, showing off their political or social influence on things, or doing silly stunts to get attention and keep their relevance in the marketplace.

Social Media in Mainstream Business

Social media has made its way into mainstream businesses, with Corporate enterprises having an active presence on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Some organizations use social media to have more than just a presence on the Internet, but to be connected with a whole new generation

of customers.

Other organizations actively use social media as a major component of their marketing, advertising, and communications with their customers. Some use social media to advertise promotions or sales campaigns. Others might use social media to run stunts of shock and horror to just gain attention to themselves. Just like the Hollywood and social media celebrities that do stunts to get “clicks”, followers, and media attention, mainstream enterprises use social media in a similar manner to stay relevant in the social and economic marketplace.

The Simplicity of Social Media

Unlike years ago when an individual who wanted fame would have to dedicate their lifetime to taking small acting parts for the chance to reach stardom, these days, in a global communications world, an individual can reach thousands and millions of individuals over the Internet by being a good social media influencer. Fame and success can come from the comfort of one's home in a matter of weeks and months, not years.

A successful social media influencer can be someone who likes to cook, that runs a cooking show that shares recipes and “cooking secrets” to an audience looking for quick and simple meal preparation guidance. A successful social media influencer can be a small-town person showing “big city folk” what it's like to live in a small community. A social media influencer doesn't have to move to Hollywood, they don't have to have an agent, they can simply start off by sharing something they like, are passionate about, that is of interest to others.

Do All Social Media Influencers Make a Living from Social Media?

No, not every social media influencer can make a living at what they do, and in fact most social media influencers don't earn enough to pay all their bills over a long period of time. Like with any business, a single good idea can only last so long, and eventually to sustain and grow the business, the product line or offering has to be diversified and expanded.

The social media influencer cook will eventually run out of special family recipes, potentially as soon as 10 or 20 “shows”. To do a show a day, the influencer would need 300, 400, 500 recipes. Many social media influencers speak of a “fatigue” in maintaining their stardom, with one BBC article that covers an influencers fatigue: <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20191022-the-fatigue-hitting->

[influencers-as-instagram-evolves](#)

Another similar article on why a social media influencer decided to quit and get out of the social media world: <https://medium.com/swlh/the-reasons-why-i-decided-to-quit-being-a-social-media-influencer-98fec266ca12>

If You Can't Earn a Living Doing Social Media, Why Do It?

Since most people don't make enough to earn a living being a social media influencer, why do they do it? It's about the “likes,” it's about making money doing what starts out to be day to day things. Individuals want to be a part of all that is going on around them. In the world of social media, it's about getting “likes” and “followers”. To be an influencer, you need to be a part of it all.

However, it's more than just being a part of the social media stream, there's actually a psychology around “likes.” Psychologically, we want to be liked and followed, so we exasperate the problem by joining into the lore. Psychology Today published an article written by Dr. Gwendolyn Seidman titled “Do Facebook Likes affect Psychological Well Being?” <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/close-encounters/201610/do-facebook-likes-affect-psychological-well-being> The net of the article is Facebook users monitor their posts to see how many people liked, loved, found humor, or shared sympathy in their posts. If we post something that we think is funny, we want others to join us in finding humor in the post.

A similar article titled “The Psychology of Being Liked on Social Media” <https://medium.com/swlh/likes-on-social-media-87bfff679602> refers to studies done on social media and how “likes” influences our continued participation in social media.



5 THE SIDE EFFECT OF MONEY AND EASY STARDOM

When a nobody can shoot to Internet stardom overnight, and when there's money and a psychological benefit that comes from Internet fame, that's when we come full circle to how information you hear or read off the Internet isn't always accurate, and in many cases more sensationalism than reality. There's nothing wrong with individuals sharing their opinion, their perspective, or their understanding of a situation. There's nothing wrong with individuals creating a story and posting it on the Internet. The important factor is that WE as individual MUST discern what is shared with us as solely opinion and perspective, NOT as fact unless or until the information is properly vetted.

Fame Before Facts

While many individuals may not purposely share falsehoods or

inaccuracies over the Internet, what they do share is not always true. If stretching the truth garners more attention and "clicks", then human motivation eggs the person on to exaggerate the story to get additional attention.

Not Really Being There

The Internet community doesn't always validate whether the eyewitness was really at the scene of the incident. An individual could be blocks or miles away from an event, but the simplicity of a post on the Internet can put them right directly as a firsthand participant without anybody knowing.

Fact Checkers?

There's no particular Internet fact checking authority that allows (or denies) individuals to post their opinions, perspectives, stories, or lore on the Internet. As there's little authority to "catch liars", there's little motivation to always tell the truth.

When fact checkers are used, by the time the facts are validated, a story could have taken off on the Internet, been Tweeted and re-Tweeted so many times that trying to undo the misinformation likely will have no real effect.

The Failures of Mainstream News

As much as we might understand that social media posts are not necessarily dependable news sources, you'd think that mainstream news services would provide better reporting. Unfortunately, mainstream news agencies that were once the cornerstone of accurate news have grossly lowered their standards in journalistic accuracy and integrity.

Fast or Accurate

Mainstream news agencies have been challenged in the era of social media where news is reported faster via Twitter and other social media methods than traditional reporters can get on scene to report on the news. News outlets have succumbed to fast and responsive over gathering all the facts and producing truly accurate reporting.

Citing Twitter for their Eyewitness News Sources

When a new agency or anyone cites Twitter posts in their article as their source of information, since anyone can create a Twitter account, the poster may not even be near the news event, but they can post as if they were an eyewitness. News agencies that use Twitter sources are merely cobbling together a rough fiction piece based on opinions and commentary. The news agencies may even be repeating false information by relying on unqualified

sources as the basis of their information.

Influenced by Advertisers

Most mainstream news organizations depend on advertising funding for their income stream. When a news agency is dependent on its operating income from advertisers, it is indirectly, and many times directly influenced by the control of their advertisers. If an advertiser “pulls out their advertising support” of a new agency because of an article, that advertiser controls the “news” shared by the agency, or the news being written is biased to not offend their advertisers. Either case, a story published by a new agency is no longer unbiased news if the truth offends an advertiser, or the advertiser has influence over the news agency in making sure the truth is warped in a manner acceptable by the advertiser.

Paid for by Clicks

In the online world, news agencies get their operating revenue just like social media influencers, by the number of clicks and “likes” they get from their online news stories. A factual article may not get as much attention as a catchy (potentially misleading) article title that garners clicks. A sensationalized story that gets a lot of views and “likes” because the content invoked feelings in the readers, both positive and negative, still gains attention, clicks, and comments that increases advertising attention. Controversial stories gain those who like and those who hate the story. The back and forth between groups of readers is what generates page views and an array of disputed comments and discussions.



6 WHEN INFORMATION IS MANIPULATION

Years ago, advertisements on the television were required to comply by “truth in advertising” laws. When an ad claimed 4 out of 5 doctors recommended something, the advertiser had to provide the documented data of the 4 out of 5 doctors. But in the day and age of social media and internet communications, there’s no “truth police”. And in fact, there’s money to be made and motivations to provide disinformation to the public.

The Business of (Dis-)information

Without a truth police fining violators or locking people up for sharing false information, the ability to create stories to misleadingly promote something can be financially beneficial to the seller. Name brand companies have found they can pay social media influencers that can say anything about a product (truthful or not) to bring awareness and sell more of an organization’s wares. No longer do 4 out of 5 doctors have to be validated, a social media influencer can say whatever they want as opinions and are not held to the same standards set forth in truth in advertising laws.

Disinformation for Fun?

Just like much of the email SPAM you get that merely clutters up your

inbox with no real purpose, a percentage of what you read on the Internet is there to just clutter your mind of invalid information. In a 2018 New York Magazine article titled “How much of the Internet is fake?” <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/12/how-much-of-the-internet-is-fake.html> the article notes that less than 60% of Internet Web traffic is human with a healthy portion of traffic on the Internet as bots conjuring up Web activity that boosts traffic, “likes,” and ultimately advertising funding.

Disinformation for Political Gain

As found in the United States Presidential Election of 2016 manipulated by the now defunct Cambridge Analytica, it was found that advertisers paid to solicit “news” to Facebook users, looking to influence the Facebook readers into thinking one way or another about a presidential candidate or initiative that was being purposely funded and promoted by an external entity. Just as Hollywood celebrities, social media influencers, and Corporate America marketing departments have found, there’s money and influence that can be bought by manipulating key levers on the Internet.

Is that a Real Organization?

Similar to SPAM emails you get coming from potentially legitimate sounding senders and organizations, websites you are drawn to may also be made up organizations. Fake sounding organizations, institutes, or government agencies can be spun up simply by creating a website. Some might think creating a website costs a lot of money and thus no one would put the time and effort into creating such fake entities, however organizations with enough motivation (to steal your money, have you hand over your access credentials, or influence your thinking on political or social matters) can go to great lengths in making their (fake) organizations sound legitimate.

Five Minutes of Fame

There are many who make up stories to get their 5 minutes of fame that is easy to do on the Internet by creating and publishing an outrageous story. For many, the ability to make headline news, or be a part of a big story and garner their 5 minutes of fame is motivation enough to say, write, or do whatever they feel they need to do to get in the limelight. Again, since there are few penalties in the world of the Internet, it’s unfortunate that the Internet has become a wild wild west in the way individuals and enterprises interact and participate on the Internet.

The Use of Bots in Communications

Bots are used in businesses just as auto-attendants on phone systems where callers are asked to press 1 for sales, 2 for service, etc. Rudimentary

Internet bots are easy to detect, they ask basic information before it sends you to some Webpage based on what it thinks you were looking for. But artificial intelligence (A.I.) has come a long way over the years, with real sounding human language support and human-like responses.

In a May/2017 paper presented at the 11th International Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AAAI) Conference on Web and Social Media, the paper noted that between 9%-15% of active Twitter accounts at the time were bots <https://aaai.org/ocs/index.php/ICWSM/ICWSM17/paper/view/15587> Bots are activated on Twitter to “like” certain Tweets, re-Tweet content to expand coverage, even post comments and reply to posts all done automatically, with no human intervention, and in seconds.

Bots for Business

In a world where activity equates to revenue from clicks and advertising, for many sites, bots start and initiate conversations. The bots egg on others to post and respond to the “conversation”. When one engages in a “dispute” with another poster or commentator, they may very well be arguing their point with a robot.

Key Things to Remember When Interacting on the Internet

Four things to remember when participating, interacting, posting, and replying to content on the Internet:

- The Validity of Our Knowledge is only as Good as our Sources - Even the person you trust might not have trustworthy sources
- Question the Source of Information – Do an independent search for the information you heard or read. Research it yourself and look for primary source along with unedited and unbiased independent data validation before you repeat the information to someone else
- Repeating Inaccurate Information is as Bad as Making it Up Yourself - Don't create, spread, or repeat rumors. Get the facts and share factual information than being a conduit for misinformation.
- Rethink Your Motivations – Do you want potential Internet fame and fortune at the risk of your personal integrity and trustworthiness? Will what you share impact your reputation that might prevent you from getting a job, a promotion, or taken serious in the future?



7 PROTECTING YOUR PERSONA ON THE INTERNET

We may not always think that what we post or do on the Internet may cause us troubles many years in the future, but it's important to know and consider the lasting effect of the Internet.

Our Social Position Today May Change Over Time

Social viewpoints change over time. What we may have believed strongly in during high school or our university years may be very different once we settle down with a family or take on specific roles of responsibility or authority. Universities are frequently referenced as institutions of social thinking as young adults leave home for the first time, have an opportunity speak up and speak out freely without their parents hovering over them, in an environment that seeks out truth and knowledge.

However, one who may be liberal thinking early on in life may take on a

job or role in a more conservative part of the country or world, that'll influence the individual to take on a more conservative perspective on things. There's nothing wrong with people changing viewpoints. The challenge with the Internet is a post, or even a handful of comments on someone else's post can haunt the person for the rest of their lives.

A person may be passed over for a promotion when a selection committee finds posts that may be deemed offensive or at least controversial enough that selecting the individual for a key role can embarrass the organization, or draw unnecessary attention that the organization chooses to avoid.

While the individual may have spent the past 2-3 decades doing great work for a specific cause, and they may be a completely different person than when they made posts 40-years prior, propaganda machines can be used against someone to discredit them and paint a picture of them of who they're not or no longer.

Entertainment Today May Be Inappropriate Tomorrow

Pictures posted on social media that may have been posted at a time of youth, out having fun with friends, doing crazy things may be funny and garner a few laughs and smiles as a teen, however years later, an organization may pass over the hiring or promotion of an individual because scenes from their past may not be appropriate of a senior manager, business executive, social leader, or youth mentor.

For many who live in States in America where marijuana is legal, United States federal law still prohibits the use and possession of marijuana as an illegal substance. For someone having a picture of them posted on the Internet smoking pot legally in one state may have difficulty getting a federal government job or serving on a federally funded project in the future.

An attorney serving high profile clients may not want pictures of him in his youth getting sloppy drunk shared with his clients. Or an oncologist may not want pictures of her out smoking and drinking with friends during her University years shared with her patients she's caring for that have cancer. Or a parent might find it difficult explaining to their teenagers how they should pay attention, not do stupid things, yet pictures on the Internet show the parent doing stupid things in their youth.

Change is Hard When Our Options are Limited

We may choose to change ourselves and change our position in life. We may have had a challenging time as a youth and want to clean ourselves up. We may have come from a life of excess and would prefer to live a life that is more socially conscious.

There are so many different ways one may begin their lives, that they'd want to change and be different in the future.

Change itself is challenging and changing when one is tied down to historical social media posts and photos makes change even more difficult. It's hard to move forward and shake the past when it's locked into social media records for all to see.

The Internet is Forever

Decades ago when cameras were not as prevalent, and photographs that were taken have long been lost or destroyed, so far with the Internet, much of the content will be around forever. Photos and posts from 5, 10, 15 years ago are still widely available on the Internet.

While not impossible, it takes time, a whole lot of effort, and a fair amount of money to get information on the Internet removed. And the bigger the footprint one has in content posted on the Internet, the longer and harder it is to get around to all of it to have it eliminated.

We all go through changes in life, we just don't want our past limiting our opportunities or impacting our ability to help others in who we've become years later in life.



8 FACTS ARE THE FACTS

With a lot of fabricated information around us, how do we know what is true and not true? The key is that facts are the facts, and if you do just a little bit of fact checking, you can minimize the risk of acting on disinformation. You can be more objective in your thinking, filling the background knowledge you have with actual information that you can base your decisions on.

Who, What, Where, Why, When, and How?

Stick to facts and try not to clutter your understanding with too many opinions and conjecture. Facts are framed by knowing who, said what, where was the information gathered from, how was it gathered, when was it gathered, and why the information was gathered in the first place. There's more to the factual background of information than can be Tweeted in 280-characters or less, the more information one has on the framework of the source and validity of information, the better one can assess the accuracy of the information

Citing Sources

When quoting statistics or citing numbers (using percentages, using the words “all”, “every”, “most”, “no one”), include the source of where the data came from. Validate the source, so just don’t take a “as reported by xyz company” as a presumed valid source, but actually read the information, take note of how the information was collected, see if the information has been peer reviewed or independently verified.

Statistically Valid Data

A proper quantified source should provide background of who, what, where, why, when, and how data was collected. You should be able to read the source data and tell yourself “yes, that’s a good sampling”. If you are still unclear how the data was collected, how any cited percentages or conclusions were made, then question the validity and accuracy of the story until you can re-assess the data.

Visual Evidence or Stock Photo?

Visual evidence can provide the reader some sense of accuracy to the story, so a photo with a recognizable reference point (landmark, street sign) and direct time designation to pinpoint the visual reference to the actual story helps to substantiate a story. Stories that use generic stock photos or a photo that has no positional or time reference, while may be visually appealing, can be misleading.

Credibility of Eyewitnesses

A video interview of an eyewitness with specific questions about what they saw, when they saw it, and what occurred is better than citing a generic Twitter post. And a video interview of someone of authority with jurisdiction of the event such as a police officer, firefighter, government official, or the like is better than trying to trust whether someone who posted a social media comment is actually at the location at the time noted.

I specifically call out “someone of authority with jurisdiction of the event” as many times “former police officers” or “trauma experts” thousands of miles away are called in to comment on the news. Just like reference to sports event commentary by former coaches and athletes, while professionals can provide commentary on similar situations, they’re not eyewitnesses nor speaking as from primary source knowledge of a specific event, so their comments need to be framed in appropriate context.

What’s Their Motivation?

One should always ask, what does one gain or potentially gain from their story? Are they about to release a book or a movie is about to be released so they’re on the promotion circuit? Are they a social media influencer that can gain clicks, “likes,” and ultimately advertising revenue from their coverage? Effectively if the person will be paid or will directly or indirectly benefit from their statements, you have to frame the context of their comments to the potential gain they may receive.



9 CONCLUSION - MAKING DECISIONS BASED ON REALITY

To wrap up the focus of this book, we want to be able to make decisions based on facts. As covered through the content of this text, it doesn't take much to have full information to make the right decisions. A few key points:

- Don't Believe Everything You Read or Hear – Even from seemingly authoritative sources like news agencies or experts, start with the general belief that what you've read or heard is an opinion, and dig in to get the facts
- Check the Facts – Before you repeat something you read or saw, effectively spreading a rumor, spend a quick moment to dig into what you've heard and see if you can validate qualified primary sources to verify the information you've heard
- Twitter is Not an Authoritative Source – At best, a Twitter post is 1 person's perspective or opinion. At worst, a Twitter post is fiction, made up by someone who wants their 5-minutes of fame or to "be a

part of the action" of something going on. Twitter sets a low bar for information credibility

- Seek Out Unbiased Information – look for resources that have limited financial, political, or social gain as sources of information.
- Verify that Multiple Sources Exist – If everything traces back to one source, if that source is inaccurate, all secondary references could be tainted. Look for supporting sources of independent perspective or research on the matter
- Are You Comfortable You Have All the Facts – Would you stake your reputation on what you know or have heard on the matter? If you're not 100% certain that you have ALL of the information that exists on the topic, then just remind yourself that partial information is not full information
- Formulate Your Decision Based on FULL Information – Speak as an authority on a topic when you feel you have full information, when you don't have full information, you're only sharing your opinion
- Don't Leave an Internet Trail that You'll Regret in the Future – What you think or do today may not be who you are and who you want people to believe you are your entire life. Be careful of leaving a record of your past that you will regret in the future.
- The Internet is Forever – Expect everything you post, "like," or comment on to follow you your entire life and is unerasable. Would that information potentially cause you embarrassment, prevent you from attaining a promotion or job opportunity, and used against you by your worst enemies? If so, don't post it!

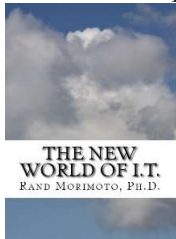
MINI-BOOK STRATEGY SERIES

This is the seventh book in the Mini-Book Strategy Series that has taken business executives through a real time journey over the past decade on changes “cloud computing” has had with the impact of continuous technology changes in enterprises. The books have been written from meetings, interviews, and ongoing dialogs with business executives around the world, with shared best practices what organizations are doing to plan, prepare, and take advantage of the changes going on in the fast-paced global marketplace.

In order and sequence of release:

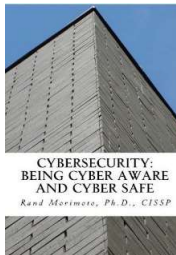
New World of I.T.

First of the series from 5+ years ago, the “New World of I.T.” identified a *change* going on in the world as “cloud-technologies” were making their way into mainstream businesses, and the way organizations were going to be leveraging technologies in their businesses was about to change.



Cybersecurity: Being Cyber Aware and Cyber Safe

Second up in the series was a book on Cybersecurity and the impact that global digital security threats were going to push organizations to make rapid changes in how they store, protect, and manage their digital assets to ward off the encroachment of cyber-criminals.



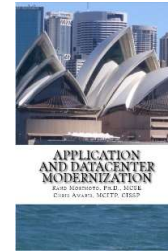
Handling Electronically Stored Information (ESI) in the Era of the Cloud

The third book in the series dove into best practices how organizations are able to address the transformation to the cloud, with cybersecurity threats, and handle the security, protection, and management of digital assets wherever they reside.



Application and Datacenter Modernization

The fourth book in the series took into account that over the previous two years, organizations have extended past the early adopter phase of organizations migrating to the cloud, to the full blown transformation of organizations planning and executing on their transition of their applications and their datacenters to modern cloud platforms.



Adapting to the New World of I.T.

Fifth up in the series is a title on the adaptation organizations go through as they have changed the way they're administering, managing, and maintaining new ways of cloud-based security, data storage, I.T. administration, and management.



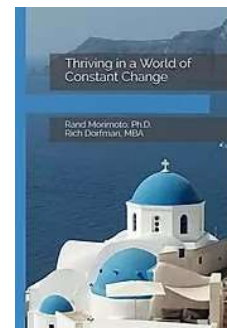
Shifting I.T. from Technologies to a Business Services Enabler

Book #6 in the series addresses what happens to I.T. operations after an organization has completed its modernization of I.T. This book covers how I.T. gets out of the day to day role of managing servers and datacenters, and helps to improve the competitive advantage of the organization.



Thriving in a World of Constant Change

The most recent of the series, and #7 in line addresses the fast pace that tech has driven into the marketplace, causing drastic changes in traditional enterprises. Mainstream industries like retail sales, entertainment, transportation, real estate, marketing, and even automobile sales have forever been changed because of tech industry organizations with online brands like Amazon, Uber, Netflix, WeWork, Tesla, and the like all turning stable industries upside down within a decade. This book highlights the impact of



those tech businesses, and what traditional enterprises can do to not only compete, but beat the new businesses at their own game.

PHOTO CREDITS

I've been asked about the photos used for my books, what the meaning of the cover photos and the photos at the start of each chapter, here's the background.

I've been the photographer for all of the photos lately, snapping off pictures on the various travels I do in a year. The photos used in each book correlates to pictures I've taken on the trip that I've written each book.

For this book, I started the framework of the book, and developed the outline on a trip to Rome. Thus, the pictures are from Rome, The Vatican, and Pompei.

My last book titled "Thriving in a World of Constant Change" was conceived and framed on a family vacation to Greece. And before that was a book on Microsoft Teams with pictures from Singapore, the "Shifting I.T." book is of London, "Adapting" book was from Paris, and so on.

The interior pictures that are placed at the start of each chapter have no particular meaning. They are merely photos taken during the trip that are interspersed within the book to add a little body to the book beyond chapter headings and words.

Although the photo used at the start of Chapter 4 of this book was hand selected for that chapter. The photo was taken in the Vatican of a statue holding some object in his hand. I thought this kind of looked like someone taking a selfie, and thus placed in on the chapter titled "The Business and Motivation of Social Influence."

So, there you have it, everything you wanted to know about the "photos" for my books.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Rand Morimoto, Ph.D.: Dr Morimoto has a unique blend of deep technical knowledge and expertise, and an academic background in organizational behavior and organizational management. Dr Morimoto describes himself as a "tinkerer" of technologies, rolling up his sleeves and beta testing technologies months and years before the products are released to the general public. And not just one brand or solution of technologies, but his insight to what organizations want, what works, and what should be developed leads Dr Morimoto to being invited to participate in the early adopter programs of most of the key products and service providers in the industry.

Dr Morimoto is a deep-rooted academic, a lover of knowledge and information that led him to pursue his studies in an MBA program, a Doctoral program, and ultimately in the role of being on the governing board of a well-known academic institution.

Dr Morimoto blends the theory of economics and his expertise in organizational behavior and organizational management with his knowledge of the tech industry, resulting in the content highlighted in this book.