Virtual Pollution

History of Information 103
Geoff Nunberg
April 30, 2015
Itinerary, 4/30

Polemics and polarization
Life on the Dark Side
Virtual Pollution: hate speech, porn and incivility
Valediction
The siloing of political discourse
Claims about online political discourse

The internet

Broadens access to information
Broadens the opportunity to speak.
Increases the number of information sources, bypassing media "gatekeepers" or official censors.
Offers information about a wider range of topics, and more information and opinion on any given topic.
Provides more reliable ways of checking or interpreting information, and gives citizens more opportunity to verify information.
Claims about online political discourse

The internet
Restricts the exchange of information and opinion to a more closed, like-minded group (silo effect)
Exposes people to more information that is misleading, inaccurate, extreme, inflammatory, etc.;
Eliminates the guidance that the traditional media provided.
Widens the divisions between the informed and ill-informed sectors of the public.
Polarization and the "Siloing" of Political Discourse

Online discourse facilitates "siloing" of political discourse…

But siloing has independent offline roots

Polarization of political language on the Internet mirrors polarization of elite/activist views and the increasing importance of elective associations (geographical, occupational)

Number of Americans living in landslide counties:
1976: 26%
2008: 48%
Figure 1: Community structure of political blogs (expanded set), shown using utilizing a GEM layout [11] in the GUESS[3] visualization and analysis tool. The colors reflect political orientation, red for conservative, and blue for liberal. Orange links go from liberal to conservative, and purple ones from conservative to liberal. The size of each blog reflects the number of other blogs that link to it.

Lada Adamic & Nathalie Glance, 2005, "Divided They Blog"
traffic is also polarized

Figure 4.4: This figure maps traffic among the top 50 political Websites, as of May 2006. Liberal- or Democratic leaning sites are in blue; conservative- or Republican-leaning sites are in red. Self-declared neutral or nonpartisan sites are in gray.
Partisan Differences in Homophily among Twitter followers


Figure 3. Core Homophilous Follower Networks Of Two Political Hubs

Note: This diagram depicts core followers of two hubs closely matched on follower count and
Polarization by age?

Average age of Fox News viewer: 65—but CNN isn’t that much lower.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Blog</th>
<th>Male readership (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>DailyKos.com</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Instapundit</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Eschaton (Atrios)</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Michelle Malkin</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Crooks and liars</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Little Green Footballs</td>
<td>89%</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Powerline</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>RedState.org</td>
<td>68%</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Wonkette</td>
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<td>Andrew Sullivan</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Kevin Drum</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Hugh Hewitt</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sites with highest pct of male readers tend to be conservative.
Reinforcing Social Divisions

Percent on Internet and by Connection Type by Age Categories

Big Age Gradient:
90% to 32%
### Polarization by gender?

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<td>29%</td>
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<td>31%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>19%</td>
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<td>19%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>29%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Crooks and liars</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<td>23%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Average**
- 27% 23% 25% 25%

Sites with highest pct of male readers tend to be conservative.
Political Participation Online

"Winner take all" effects: Zipf's Law distributions
(note: Most influential bloggers are journalists etc.)
Internet doesn't level political participation or
access to political information within society…
But it may broaden participation & information
flow among political classes…
And does facilitate lateral connections &
organization
What you tweet

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Republicans</th>
<th>Democrats</th>
<th>African-American</th>
<th>Starbucks fans</th>
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<td>net</td>
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<td>songz</td>
<td>...</td>
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<td>stimulus</td>
<td>homophobia</td>
<td>betta</td>
<td>sms</td>
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<tr>
<td>liberty</td>
<td>veggie</td>
<td>dats</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>patriots</td>
<td>baggers</td>
<td>finna</td>
<td>virus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taxpayer</td>
<td>rwnj</td>
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<td>restart</td>
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<tr>
<td>feds</td>
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<td>flocka</td>
<td>recipes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taxpayers</td>
<td>wingnuts</td>
<td>bruh</td>
<td>oatmeal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trillion</td>
<td>mandela</td>
<td>boondocks</td>
<td>tasting</td>
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<tr>
<td>naacp</td>
<td>argh</td>
<td>jeezy</td>
<td>espresso</td>
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<tr>
<td>socialism</td>
<td>cinema</td>
<td>brothia</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>pastor</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>omfg</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>libraries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pennachiotti & Popescu, 2012
"Branded content" & the future of campaign advertising
Effects of the Internet

The Internet potentially amplifies and enhances all forms of social organization

… But doesn't eliminate basic conflicts and oppositions…
Participation in online political discourse
Participation in online political discourse

Does the net level the informational playing field?
Initially, those with access tend to be younger, college-educated, male, white...

Curves of access are flattening...
But among those w/access, older users are more likely to be daily users...

But how much does access/daily use predict political engagement?
Political Participation Online

Percent on Internet and by Connection Type by Socio-Economic Level

Big SES Gradient:
44% in 1st to 99% in 5th

Courtesy of Henry Brady
Political Participation Online

Percent Using Social Networking Sites
by Socio-Economic Level

Social Networking Less
Stratified by SES:
18% in 1st to 33% in 5th
Political Participation Online

Percent Web Political Acts and Social Networking by Socio-Economic Level

Web Political Acts Much More SES Stratified than Social Networking:
11% in 1st to 65% in 5th
Political activity is highly correlated with income, whether that activity takes place online or offline.

The proportion of adults within each income category who have participated in two or more online or offline political activities within the last twelve months.
Virtual Pollution
Spatial Models of Electronic Discourse: "Cyberspace"

The New Jerusalem, ca. 1992

Cyberspace: A world in which the global traffic of knowledge, secrets, measurements, indicators, and alter-human agency takes on form: sights, sounds, presences never seen on the surface of the earth blossoming in a vast electronic night. . . . From vast databases that constitute the culture's deposited wealth, every document is available, every recording is playable, and every picture is viewable. The realm of pure information, filling like a lake.

— Michael Benedikt, Introduction to Cyberspace, MIT Press, 1991

Visualizations of cyberspace
The virtual Bowery

[The Internet is] a place where crime is rampant and every twisted urge can be satisfied. Thousands of virtual streets are lined with casinos, porn shops, and drug dealers. Scam artists and terrorists skulk behind seemingly lawful Web sites. And cops wander through once in a while, mostly looking lost. It's the Strip in Las Vegas, the Red Light district in Amsterdam, and New York's Times Square at its worst, all rolled into one -- and all easily accessible from your living room couch.

"The Underground Web," Business Week, 9/2/02
Brown and Duguid's six D's

- Decentralization
- Denationalization
- Despatialization
- Disintermediation
- Disaggregation
- Dematerialization
The Dark Side of the Virtual

Brown and Duguid's six D's

Decentralization
Denationalization
Despatialization
Disintermediation
Disaggregation
Dematerialization

What happens when we eliminate material and social constraints and boundaries
Magnifying Social Deviance

zhokhar Tsarnaev: Bombing Suspect Has Online Following

NEW THIS MORNING
BROTHERS BOUGHT FIREWORKS FOR BOMBS
LIKELY USED AS INGREDIENTS

Sick Boston Marathon bombing game hits the Internet
April 24, 2013 by Tom Tillison 1 Comment

Well, that didn’t take very long at all.

Just nine days after two bombs exploded at the finish line of the Boston Marathon, killing three and leaving scores injured, a sick video game based on the terror attack has been developed.

The game, “The Boston Marathon: Terror on the Streets,” has emerged on the Internet, according to the Daily Mail, with players taking on the role of a marathon runner attempting to jump over pressure cooker bombs. Dead and injured runners are seen in the street, splattered in blood.

What the Boston bombing taught us about Internet arrogance

BY FRANCISCO DAO
ON APRIL 23, 2013

Most of the tech industry, or at least the most vocal parts of it, have a prevailing belief that the Internet will solve everything while the government is little more than a parasite and obstacle that only serves to prevent the collective forces of the Web from solving all of the world’s problems. While I think everyone can agree that the government does a lot of stupid things, the increasingly popular view that the government is unnecessary and/or evil and all we need is a bunch of entrepreneurs and the almighty Internet to fix everything is frankly asinine arrogance of the highest order.
Uses and Abuses of Chatter

Boston police turn to Twitter for tips after twin bombings
The Boston Police Department uses its official Twitter feed to disseminate information and gather potential evidence.

Social
Boston Marathon Bomb Photos Engulf Twitter

Man on roof near Boston Marathon bombings sparks Twitter debate

Who is this person? Individual seen walking on roof directly overhead as bomb goes off at Boston Marathon.

bit.ly/10YspoR
3:28 PM - 15 Apr 2013
This amateur photographer's images of the Baltimore riots are going viral on Instagram

First Night of Baltimore's Curfew: State of Emergency - Baltimore, Maryland

Amid Unrest in Baltimore, Images Of Empty Ballpark Game Between Orioles And White Sox

Texas GOP lawmaker: 'What is going on in Baltimore' is because of too many gay marriages

Good morning baltimore - YouTube

How Baltimore police, protesters battle on Twitter

9 TWITTER USERS WHO ARE ON THE GROUND IN BALTIMORE

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Internet imams may have inspired Boston Marathon bombers

Boston bombing revives debate over online extremism

On the freewheeling net, extremists of all stripes are looking to radicalize, recruit, and disseminate propaganda among an infinitely wider audience.

Boston Bombing Sparks Firestorm Of Internet Hate

April 22, 2013  12:00 PM
Varieties of "Rotten Information"

Problems of authenticity: fakes, hoaxes, forgeries, plagiarism, etc.

Problems of quality: reliability and “authoritativeness”

Problems of “pollution”: pornography, violence, racism & hate speech, predators, incivility, etc.

Mary Douglas: "Dirt is matter out of place... Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements."

How to tell pollution from the merely "unacceptable"?
The boundaries of discourse: A racist hoax

THE FRANKLIN PROPHECY
Recorded by Charles Coteworth Pinckney
Delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1787

"I fully agree with General Washington, that we must protect this young nation from an insidious influence and impenetration. The menace, gentlemen, is the Jews.

"In whatever country, number, they have settled in any great number, they have lowered its moral tone; depreciated its commercial integrity; have segregated themselves and have not been assimilated; have sneered at and tried to undermine the Christian religion upon which that nation is founded...."

. If you do not exclude them from these United States, in their Constitution, in less than 200 years they will swarmed here in such great numbers that they will dominate and change our form of government...

"I cannot find a single original source that gives the slightest justification for believing that the Prophecy is anything more than a barefaced forgery. Not a word have I discovered in Franklin’s letters and papers expressing any such sentiments against the Jews as are ascribed to him by the Nazis — American and German.”

Charles Beard, NY Times, March 10, 1937.
Pervasiveness of Hate Speech

George Washington & Benjamin Franklin on the Jews

Benjamin Franklin was already an elder statesman at the time of the American Revolution. And his years had certainly brought him wisdom, for he knew of the Jews' nature, and he had the courage to warn his followers about them. Benjamin Franklin's warning to the Constitutional Convention in 1787 concerning the Jews has been called a marvel of prophecy. But, really, Franklin was only speaking about the Jewish people. This prophecy was recorded by Charles Pinckney of Charleston, South Carolina, held at the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia.

“I fully agree with General Washington, that we must protect this young nation from an insidious influence and impenetrability. The menace, gentlemen, is the Jews. In whatever country Jews have settled in any great numbers, they have lowered its moral tone; depreciated its commercial integrity; have segregated themselves and have not been assimilated; have sneered at and tried to undermine the Christian religion upon which that nation is founded, by objecting to its restrictions; have built up a state within a state; and when opposed have tried to strangle that country to death financially, as in the case of Spain and Portugal.

For some unknown reason, our school children today don't get to read these sage admonitions....

This prophecy, by Benjamin Franklin, was made in a "CHIT CHAT AROUND THE TABLE DURING INTERMISSION," at the Philadelphia Constitutional Convention of 1787. This statement was recorded in the diary of Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, a delegate from South Carolina.

The Franklin Prophecy

The Islam-West Debate: Documents from a Global Debate on the Future of Islam

The menace, gentlemen, is the Jews. In whatever country Jews have settled in any great number, they have lowered its moral tone; depreciated its commercial...
Pervasiveness of Hate Speech

The Call for Participation for Wikimania 201
released. Submit your presentations before

The Franklin Prophecy
From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

"The Franklin Prophecy", sometimes called
"The Franklin Forgery", is an antisemitic speech
falsely attributed to Benjamin Franklin, warning

The Franklin "Prophecy"
Modern Anti-Semitic Myth Making

Introduction

This article, which thoroughly documents the history of the truth as the Franklin "Prophecy", appeared almost forty-five years 1954 issue of Facts, a publication of the Anti-Defamation League. The authors wrote "This 20-year-old anti-Semitic hoax is circulating after sixty-five years it was manufactured, the "Prophecy" as a staple of anti-Semitic propaganda. It can be found on a number of websites, maintained by haters and hate-groups. The article is, therefore,
An Awkward Search Result
If you recently used Google to search for the word "Jew," you may have seen results that were very disturbing. We assure you that the views expressed by the sites in your results are not in any way endorsed by Google. ... A site's ranking in Google's search results relies heavily on computer algorithms using thousands of factors to calculate a page's relevance to a given query. Sometimes subtleties of language cause anomalies to appear that cannot be predicted. ... 

What would you tell Google to do?
Why is racist speech a problem?

How concerned should we be about racist speech?
Is there more racist speech than before?...
Or is it just more visible – like bad spelling?
Porn in the Library!

City libraries say 'checking out' porn protected by First Amendment

By DOUGLAS MONTERO and BOB FREDERICKS
Last Updated: 8:08 AM, April 25, 2011
Posted: 1:54 AM, April 25, 2011

Shakespeare's plays, Einstein's theories — and porn queen Jenna Jameson's steamy on-screen sexcapades.

New Yorkers can take their pick at the city's public libraries, thanks to a policy that gives patrons the most uncensored access to extreme, hard-core Internet smut this side of the old Times Square.

The electronic smut falls under the heading of free speech and the protection of the First Amendment, library officials say.

"What they're doing is publicly funding an appetite for the most debased fare available," said Catholic League President Bill Donohue. "It's not like a Playboy centerfold anymore — it's far worse."
The profusion of pornography

Whereas pornography was once furtively glimpsed at dimly lighted newsstands or seedy adult theaters, today it is everywhere. It pours in over the Internet, sometimes uninvited, sometimes via eagerly forwarded links…

…Whereas children used to supplement sex education by tearing through *National Geographic* in search of naked aboriginals … today many are confronted by pornographic images on a daily basis. In a 2001 poll by the Kaiser Family Foundation, 70% of 15-to 17-year-olds said they had accidentally come across pornography online.

*Time*, January 19, 2004
Dimensions(?) of the Problem

"More than 4 million Web sites worldwide show images of children being sexually exploited, said the U.N. investigator on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography…"

"It is estimated that 100,000 sites contain child pornography."

"A total of 4.2 million websites contain pornography."

≤1% of Websites contain porn. Philip B. Stark UCB, 2006 (100-200m sites in all)

… But what do the numbers really mean?
### How Porn Sites are Used: An Exception to "Winner Take All"

#### Distribution of User Volume Among Sites

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Sites</th>
<th>% of traffic</th>
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<td>32.36</td>
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<td>82.26</td>
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<td>94.92</td>
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*Adamic & Huberman, 2000*
How Porn Sites are Used: An Exception to "Winner Take All"

Distribution of User Volume Among Sites

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Adamic & Huberman, 2000
Responses to Rotten Information

- Technological solutions
- Institutional & organizational adaptations
- Social/cultural change
- Appeals to market forces
- Legislative and legal remedies
Technology to the rescue?

What if the baseball could repair the window?

The internet caused the problem. It's only fitting it should also provide the solution.
Filtering Frenzy

RemoteWebGuard
We’ll help you help yourself.

April 25, 2011 13:44 ET

Addicts Seek Help as US Internet Porn Addiction Rates Reach Alarming Heights

New Web-Based Services Like RemoteWebGuard Help Addicts by Monitoring Online Behavior and Blocking Tempting Sites

Which parts of the Internet will your family visit?

Ad for McAfee’s GuardDog software
Legal Solutions

Children's Internet Protection Act:
Passed in 2001 -- 3rd attempt to regulate online porn
Limits of Text Blocking

- Text unavailable (imaged, etc.)
- Confusion with innocent text
- Need to block IP numbers
- "Loophole" sites: anonymizer sites, Google cache & images
- Inherent trade-offs of precision and recall

Precision = $\frac{R}{N}$
Recall = $\frac{R}{M}$
Limits of Image Classification

Images found "Probably Objectionable" by WIPE (Wavelet Image Pornography Elimination / Detection).
Libraries can regulate use by means of use policies, training and guidance, monitoring of logs, tap-on-the-shoulder policies, etc.

Rights of other patrons can be protected by privacy screens, etc.

Parents can assume responsibility for monitoring kids’ surfing.

Providers can offer "greenspace" browsers for kids.
Social & Institutional Responses

Even porn can get old…

MMORPG: World of Warcraft Blamed for Porn’s Decline

Porn industry blames $74m decline on the rise of online dating

Facebook and MySpace are Killing Porn?

Porn Flounders, But Adult Novelty Business Booms

Published: Tuesday, 27 Oct 2009 | 10:47 AM ET
“Since the nineteenth century, every new form of communication has multiplied the opportunities for unwelcomed intrusions on our persons and privacy…

“The serenading troubadour can now thrum his throbbing guitar before the transmitter undisturbed by apprehensions of shotguns and bulldogs,” 1884
... In their power and ubiquity, digital technologies introduce hitherto unimaginable possibilities for being uncivil and inconsiderate: cyber-bullying, tweeting or checking your mail in the middle of a meeting, posting anonymous defamations about an ex-boss or ex-girlfriend..., lurking and trolling on blogs and discussion lists, and all the other forms of misbehavior that new media have given rise to.

The repeal of reticence...

The new vocabulary of incivility: trolls, sock-puppets, flamers, lurkers, shaming....
Redefining social categories

"the technological constraints and affordances of a site will shape user practices and...social norms will emerge over time." Ellison & Boyd

“it is often difficult for two users who both call each other a friend to know if they are talking about the same thing” (Fono & Raynes-Goldie 2006)

Or is it?

"Drama implies something not to be taken seriously, ... while the adult-defined 'bullying' connotes childishness or immaturity to teenagers." Marwick & Boyd
We've been here before

Where else has technology interacted with social, political, and economic forces to produce outcome?
We've been here before

Where else has technology interacted with social, political, and economic forces to produce outcome?
Where hasn't it?

Writing
Print
Telegraph & telephone
Newspapers
Advertising
Propaganda
Photography
Radio & TV
Computers
Search
Internet…
Looking Backwards

Which classes were most/least valuable?

Which readings were most/least valuable?

How could assignments be improved?

Other suggestions...
Good-bye and good luck