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Truth vs. Truthiness

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10945/39074>

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“LIES AND
PROPAGANDA ARE
POISONING US”

TRUTH — *vs.* — TRUTHINESS

Truth?

Obviously, people are shaped by the information they consume. As with the saying, "You are what you eat," it's fair to assume "You become a carrier of the beliefs you consume." As genes shape our bodies and traits, memes shape our minds and behaviors.

In the Information Age, where people can produce and disseminate memes with high production qualities and reach millions of consumers quickly, the world is experimenting on a global basis with mass communication of infectious ideas. Will this produce enlightenment? Delusion? Edification? Resistance to science? While the jury is still out, some significant risks are apparent.

- Powerful entities have an interest in gaining mass acceptance of their agendas
- Governments and incumbents have incentives to control what people hear
- People have trouble discerning what's true
- People are overwhelmed by exponentially increasing amounts of available information

Solution

It seems clear that democracy and modern civilization might be at risk if citizens either give up on knowing what's true or can't easily separate credible information from propaganda and other types of misinformation. So my current research focuses on several potentially vital elements of a solution:

1. How should claims be assessed for credibility?
2. How should credible information be highlighted and filtered?
3. What type of organization, funding, and governance can be employed to curate the vast amount of potentially important information?
4. What mechanisms can support a large-scale distributed exchange of truth values about information?
5. Which mechanisms would be effective at enabling citizens and consumers to perceive and act on differences in assessed information credibility?

In short, we are focusing on market mechanisms for truth telling. One of our [studies assesses whether people will alter their judgments based on perceived quality of information](#). In such a marketplace, people will have ways to promote their claims with third-party certificates of trustworthiness, and other people will have ways to earn money by falsifying incorrect claims. This should create incentives for truth telling, give truth tellers competitive advantages in the marketplace of ideas, and also reward

people for diligently scrubbing bogus ideas from the public commons. These ideas are explained in more depth in "[The Value of Truth Telling](#)."

These ideas span many disciplines but fall squarely within the domain of "information science." As Shannon was keenly aware from the moment he invented information theory, the value of a bit is its ability to reduce the receiver's uncertainty and thus enable the selection of a better outcome. In our work, we are focusing on how to make the bits trustworthy, because without that quality, the bits do not enable those outcomes. For a receiver to make better decisions, he or she needs to get correct information and trust it. The Internet Age has succeeded thus far in increasing the amount of information available, but it has contributed little to helping the receiver know that it's true. As a consequence, many correctly assume the information they receive should not be trusted. This cynicism costs the society greatly, and it won't get better until people can quickly gauge the credibility of information and can filter information accordingly.



Available podcasts and audio book:

Chris Mooney (2012). "Point of Inquiry: Rick Hayes-Roth and TruthMarket." Interview and podcast [here](#).

Emmett Miller (2012). "Truthiness Fever: A Conversation with Rick Hayes-Roth." Interview and podcast [here](#).

Hayes-Roth, Rick (2012). *Truthiness Fever: How Lies and Propaganda are Poisoning Us and a Ten-Step Program for Recovery*. Narrated by Dr. Emmett Miller. [Audible Book](#).

Available publications:

Peter Denning (2011). "Honesty is the Best Policy. An Interview with Rick Hayes-Roth." *Ubiquity*, vol. **2011**, July. [Part 1](#), pp 1-8, [Part 2](#), pp 1-9.

Hayes-Roth, Rick (2011). *Truthiness Fever: How Lies and Propaganda are Poisoning Us and a Ten-Step Program for Recovery*. Booklocker.com. [Website here](#).

Hayes-Roth, Rick (2011). "How Trustworthiness Seals Can Highlight Information and Influence Decisions." Research Working Paper, [available here](#).

Hayes-Roth, Rick (2011). "The Value of Truth Telling." Research Working Paper, [available here](#).

History and obituary of TruthSeal & TruthMarket:

After two years' effort, our experiments to make truth telling profitable failed. The story is interesting, and others might benefit from the lessons learned. [Read the obituary here](#).

Go back to [home page](#).

