

The New Information State: How Information Ethics and Policy Affects Everyone

SIG INFORMATION ETHICS AND POLICY

1/2 DAY WORKSHOP (OCTOBER 28TH A.M.)

ABSTRACT

In today's milieu of fake news, misinformation, and generalized distrust of institutions, information ethics and policy affects everyone, across different information science research areas. In this workshop, we will analyze these changes to the informational state and discuss how we can address them through **three themes: pedagogy for information ethics and policy, engagement with policymakers, and information ethics and policy across information science**. Workshop participants are encouraged to participate in a variety of ways and will leave the workshop with tangible products that can be used in research and teaching.

CONTRIBUTIONS

For the workshop, we seek several different types of contributions:

- **Panel:** A panel should incorporate two of the themes (see below, under workshop organization) and each panel is encouraged to include at least one person outside academia. Panels should be explicit about which themes are addressed and include a brief biography of each contributor.
- **Paper:** A paper should address one of the themes (see below) in detail, tying it back to the broader discussion of the changed information state. Papers should be 3500-5000 words.
- **Speaker:** We seek volunteers to synthesize these themes (see below) and address potential big-picture implications of these trends. Those interested in being a featured speaker should submit a c.v. and a brief essay (under 5000 words) on these themes.

The deadline for all contributions is 8/18. Contributions should be emailed to Shannon Oltmann at shannon.oltmann@uky.edu. Contact Shannon Oltmann with any questions.

INTRODUCTION

Today, we live in a milieu of fake news, misinformation, post-truth, and generalized distrust of media, government, and other institutions, as well as a variety of scientific and factual sources. The Pew Research Center has documented differences between scientists and the general public on topics such as climate change, human evolution, and vaccine-caused autism (Funk & Rainie, 2015). The Trump administration has enacted policies that restrict access to information, such as issuing gag orders to various federal agencies (Davenport, 2017). Trump has proposed a federal budget that would eliminate funding to agencies such as the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and would severely

reduce the budget of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) (Soffen & Lu, 2017); if enacted, this budget would result in changes to the flow of information from these agencies to the public, as well as diminish the creation of new data and information. The president himself regularly tweets about “fake news” (Christensen & Curiel, 2017; Levy, 2017). Braman (2006) noted that “a key characteristic of the modern nation-state since its inception has been its reliance upon evidence about actual social conditions as inputs into decision-making” (p. 320), yet this basic proposition seems to be under threat in the Trump administration.

In summary, the state of information in our society has changed dramatically, harkening to Braman’s (2006) discussion of the information state. Today, we see a change *within* the information state, reflecting differences in how data, facts, and information are (mis)used and (mis)managed. Over a decade ago, Braman suggested that “Because informational power has altered the materials, rules, institutions, ideas, and symbols that are the means by which other forms of power are exercised, a new type of system, the informational state, has emerged” (p. 4). Today, this argument seems both prescient and especially timely.

Academics, policymakers, advocates, and concerned citizens are grappling with how to address, manage, and respond to these changes in the informational state. In this era, we believe analysis and discussion of information ethics and policy (IEP) can benefit everyone, across different information science research areas.

IEP is an area of scholarship that is vast, important, and constantly evolving. It influences, and is influenced by, every content area within the purview of ASIS&T. It has substantial overlap with a range of academic disciplines (law, political science, history, communications, journalism, economics, among others). It is also a fundamental part of information studies curricula. Because of the scope and importance of IEP it is crucial for educators and researchers to work with others in building a broad understanding. We argue that this is even more fundamentally important in today’s society. For the broadest range of scholars and educators to provide the best possible education and research in IEP, we must share ideas about approaches, themes, topics, and perspectives. And we must do so in ways that allow non-specialist scholars to understand key insights and questions from different approaches and themes to help them convey these concepts and perspectives to students from an array of backgrounds.

WORKSHOP ORGANIZATION

This workshop will have three themes that each connect to and expand upon the implications of the changed informational state:

- **Pedagogy**: as academics and educators, what should we teach our students in this changed informational state, and how should we teach it? This will include case studies and sample syllabi on information ethics and policies. This thematic focus is primarily for those who teach (or plan to teach) IEP curricula, to develop and expand their teaching toolbox.
- **Engagement with policymakers**: designed to yield practical, effective strategies for interacting with practitioners and policymakers to use incorporate scientific information and data in decision making. This will include discussion of new challenges in the

information policy landscape. We anticipate this thematic area to be discussion-oriented, as policymakers and practitioners engage with researchers and educators, focusing on how their different orientations can inform across boundaries.

- **Ethics across information science:** discussion of how information ethics affects and interacts with other information science domains, such as human-computer interaction, organization of information, and social informatics. This will enable those in other areas to incorporate ethics into their research and teaching and should lead to new collaborations. This thematic focus is primarily targeted for those looking to incorporate IEP issues and orientations into research and teaching that is not currently IEP-focused. In other words, we see this theme as a particularly good fit for scholars from other research areas and disciplines who are interested in the cross-disciplinary nature of IEP.

REFERENCES

- Braman, S. (2006). *Change of state: Information, policy, and power*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Christensen, D., & Curiel, J. (2017). What Trump's tweets tell us about his TV viewing—and his thinking. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/04/13/what-trumps-tweets-tell-us-about-his-tv-viewing-and-his-thinking/?utm_term=.6e9ba6bfae33
- Davenport, C. (2017). Federal agencies told to halt external communications. New York Times. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/25/us/politics/some-agencies-told-to-halt-communications-as-trump-administration-moves-in.html>
- Funk, C., & Rainie, L. (2015). Chapter 3: Attitudes and beliefs on science and technology topics. Pew Research Center: Public and scientists' views on science and society. Available here: <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/01/29/chapter-3-attitudes-and-beliefs-on-science-and-technology-topics/#vaccines-and-access-to-experimental-treatments-18-point-gap>
- Levy, G. (2017). Trump tweetstorm before key House intelligence hearing. U.S. News & World Report. Available at: <https://www.usnews.com/news/politics/articles/2017-03-20/trump-tweets-call-russia-connection-fake-news-hours-before-comes-clapper-testify>
- Soffen, K., & Lu, D. (2017). What Trump cut in his budget. The Washington Post. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/trump-presidential-budget-2018-proposal/?utm_term=.1f8943a8fee8