Discovering Truth: How Both Liberals and Conservatives Are Being Brainwashed Into Polarized Beliefs That Jeopardize America's Safety

By Tim Love

How do people use information to determine what they perceive as truth? How has digital access to information changed that? This paper presents findings and conclusions emerging from my career in the marketing communications industry and from interviews this year in the podcast series *Discovering Truth*. A new mode of brainwashing has emerged, but rooted in the old principles. Self-blocking of alternative ideas and information has resulted in what we might call Intellect Appetite Disorder (IAD) and it is affecting liberals and conservatives alike, polarizing our country, making it virtually impossible to reach broad consensus of opinion, and leaving us vulnerable to influences from foreign and special interest group propaganda.

Background

The Discovering Truth lecture and podcast series examines the difficulty of determining truth in a Twitter world of heightened social media information and data, fake news, foreign propaganda, hacks and lies. Top communications professionals and activists discuss influences of new communication technologies and provide useful suggestions to better discern the differences between fact and fiction. Series table of contents and link are attached as Exhibit I.

A key motivation behind the initiative was my deep concern with the behavior in idea exchanges among close personal friends, colleagues and some family members. I observed an increasing polarization of opinions in our society and in public and social media. It reminded me of the Vietnam War era dissent. As in that era, we have liberal and conservative aggressively combative points of view and the general discourse has become less civil.

I was raised a Republican. My imprint for Republican values was Eisenhower, for whom I still have much admiration. I think of myself as a "cooperative" Republican, which does not exist in the Republican party as I see it evolved today. However, politics aside, I have attempted to limit my investigation into truth to my area of expertise: 42 years in the global advertising and marketing communication business. This stems from a focus on how ideas and communication technology affect us, utilizing a strategic discipline called Belief Dynamics.   Belief Dynamics postulates that our perceptions lead to our beliefs and our beliefs fuel our behavior.

Overall Conclusions

We are experiencing a modern-day Reformation of beliefs. "Social media" with the ability for individuals to create content and pass it along to others is shifting the power of information from prior authorities to the individuals it connects. We each are left to decide whether content is good or bad, real or fake, truth or lies.

The evolution to the Semantic Web around 2013 using artificial intelligence enabled internet communications platforms to be more responsive to an individual's prior thought behavior. This allowed advertising and platforms to provide greater consistency of information targeted to our prior behavior in using the internet and the subject matter we typically engage in.

Fake news sites are flourishing in America's information ecosystem, spreading hard-to-detect fake information and stories on the most used platforms. Foreign influencers, special interest groups and criminal actors can use advanced algorithms and bots to siphon money and otherwise profit off the machine placement of advertising by unwitting advertisers' purchases. Importantly, a 3-year review by the Republican-led Senate intelligence Agency unanimously supported this week the US intelligence community finding that Russia interfered in our 2016 elections to undercut American democracy. This was not a false narrative by some "deep state" as has been propagated by some news commentators.

In the face of massive quantities of conflicting information in social and public media, confusion is heightened. This results in both liberals and conservatives hardening their political stances by self-restricting their perception to only take in information that conforms or reinforces their prior beliefs. This self-restriction or blocking of new information is a form of self-administered brainwashing I call Intellect Appetite Disorder (IAD). Extreme liberals and conservatives both exhibit IAD.

Key Learning
1) Truth is an interpretation of choices we make from information we encounter in forming our perceptions.   Possibly the oldest question of all time is, "What is truth?" People throughout history have attempted to answer this question. The German scholar Nietzsche, who had a strong influence on western philosophy concluded: *"There are no facts, only interpretation."* The dictionary definition of truth is: A fact or belief that is accepted as true.

Truth is an interpretation of fact or reality. We have to first choose to accept information as true. This process of discernment is especially difficult given the flood of information bombarding us today and the multitude of choices of information we have to determine truth.

2) The proliferation of more liberal and conservative media channels is making it harder to perceive a consensus of opinion. This is leading to more polarized thinking by liberals and conservatives alike. A lack of general consensus heightens confusion over who speaks authoritatively of truth.   In Episode #1 of our podcast series we visited Orwell's suggestion that totalitarian control flourishes when there is no consensus point of view present in a society. A lack of general consensus creates a breeding ground for fanatical ideas to propagate.

Surrounding people with so much cynicism that they lose faith in the possibility of a consensus truth is a tactic Russia media analyst Vasily Gatov calls "white jamming." The strategy of white-jamming with contrary information of increasingly more extreme liberal and conservative content exacerbates the lack of consensus opinion. Author and Russia watcher Peter Pomerantsev calls this "propaganda unreality." He cautions that it is not new, but the tactics of resistance to manipulation do not work against the kind of unreality we have today.

There are many examples of times our country has had a high level of consensus for better or worse: the Great Depression, after Pearl Harbor WWII, the "Southeast Asia Conflict" (consensus 1959-1965) and the Vietnam War (with increasingly less consensus 1966-1972). We had general consensus about the quest to land on the moon in 1969 and the country rallied together after 9/11. After the financial crisis of 2008 there has been relatively less sustained consensus in American opinion until the present pandemic. Despite mixed and misinformed messages at the beginning of this pandemic we now have a growing consensus that we face a pervasive threat to our health and way of life. This consensus is in spite of FoxNews accusing other media of overreacting to the threat and calling the pandemic a hoax in the early days of the crisis. FoxNews is now facing a lawsuit for their misinformation which led 79% of FoxNews viewers to believe the severity of the crisis was overstated.

3) The increased reliance by all news media on Twitter for disseminating unfiltered messages that are not fact-checked is distorting America's perception of truth. Advancements in communication technology have been a key catalyst in other periods in history when there was a reformation of belief over who had authority for truth. The compounded power of President Trump's preferred method of messaging, Twitter, with coverage of his tweets in virtually all social and public news sites, is having a significant influence on people's perceptions.

Increasing reliance on unfiltered and spontaneous messaging on 24-hour news cycles by opinion television and radio personalities amplifies both liberal and conservative white jamming. The proliferation of media fractionalization catering to specific audiences has exhibited an equally strong polarization among news channels and web-based news sites.

We can see a similar kind of disruptive impact on people's belief systems by studying how innovations in communication technology have been used and abused throughout history. Martin Luther used the Gutenberg press to disrupt perception that the Catholic Church was the sole authority for truth from the Bible. Radio and public address systems were instrumental during the propaganda ramp-up to World War II. Gandhi, FDR and Churchill rallied the world against totalitarian philosophies by using these same communication technologies.

Today President Trump has an estimated 77 million Twitter followers. Since 2009 when he first began using Twitter to promote his book he has published over 42,000 original tweets: 29.000 text only, 3,300 replies and over 10,000 links and images. As tweets are repeated over news channels and sites, both liberal and conservative, they amplify the power of the President to influence public opinion. (See Exhibit II attached.)

A recent study of Twitter impact by MIT shows that false stories travel faster and farther than true stories with 35% more audience delivery. This is because false stories are seen as abnormal and are more likely to be shared. The news media that competes for audience size to attract advertising revenue has little incentive or time to screen tweets for truth. In a June 2019 interview with ABC TV, President Trump said of his reliance on Twitter: "I put it out, and then it goes onto your platform. It goes onto ABC. It goes onto the networks. It goes all over cable. It's

an incredible way of communicating." Net, it is an incredibly powerful way to communicate whether the content is true or false.

4) Information Overload is Increasing, making it harder to determine truth. Today, we have access to exponentially more information than at any time in human history. Internet and cable came into our lives around 1995 and proliferated. Artificial intelligence, bots and fake information add a more sinister element to the mix. In the face of confusion from the sheer volume of conflicting information, people self-restrict information to maintain preexisting beliefs and AI further funnels what we receive. An "echo chamber" effect results where beliefs get progressively more intransigent. This is making discourse more extreme, more polarized and less civil.

There are psychological and physiological effects people experience with the massive amounts of information. Signal jamming occurs in satellite-based navigation technology when too many signals or intentionally competitive interfering signals enter the receiver. Our brains can experience a similar neurological-based phenomenon: "information overload," which results in overstimulation of the brain. Recent research indicates our brains can store as much information as currently exists on the internet, but trying to consume and sift the information too quickly puts the brain's health in danger. Characteristics of overload are anxiety, high blood pressure, over-compulsive behavior, insomnia and mood swings. Historian Daniel Boorstin , twelfth Librarian of the United States Congress warns, "We can drown in our technology. The fog of information can drive out knowledge."

5) Intellect Appetite Disorder (IAD) is a form of self-imposed brainwashing that is created by the consumption of massive amounts of conflicting information. Oxford's definition of brainwashing is: The activity of forcing somebody to accept your ideas or beliefs. for example by repeating the same thing many times or by preventing the person from thinking clearly.

IAD is not a new phenomenon but a term for our era. Repetition makes a fact or idea seem more true regardless of whether it is true or not. *"Repeat a lie often enough and it becomes truth"* is a law of propaganda often attributed to Lenin and Joseph Goebbels. IAD is a self-inflicted repetition of ideas and beliefs, not only on the internet and media vehicles, but also through holistic sources of information, including friends and family. An example of massive repetition was the claim "weapons of mass destruction" to incite public opinion prior to the Iraq invasion. There are many more recent examples of political rhetoric repetition with sensational sound bites. Examples of IAD from history are in the psyches of practitioners of some religions and philosophies, and the followers of charismatic, despotic or cult figures who have encouraged restrictive thought and behavior.

IAD occurs when people feel discomfort with information that disrupts their homeostasis (a psychological and physiological feeling of safety and normalcy). It is different than Compulsive Internet Use (CIU), Problematic Internet Use (PIU), Internet Addiction Disorder, all forms of

internet usage dependency that are well researched. IAD is about thought selection and it exists in extremist movements everywhere.

It is normal to screen through and sift information before ingesting and embracing it, but overload makes this harder. Involuntary self-restriction of information is an abnormal psychological condition. It is about the process of assimilating information that forms perceptions. Dr Peter Ditto, a social psychologist at the University of California, says that our wishes, fears and motives "tip the scales to make us more likely to accept something as true if it supports what we want to believe." In Discovering Truth, Episode #13, cyber-security researcher Dr Augustine Fou states, "People hear what they want to hear and share what supports their worldview."

In a horserace for truth, blinders and fences narrow our view, direct our focus, and lock us into the aforementioned echo chamber thinking. IAD, which is extreme, habitual self-restriction of ideas can lead to outcomes similar to enforced brainwashing. The effect of brainwashing is difficult to detect and easily denied, especially when the repeated exposure to ideas and beliefs is self-administered and becomes a habit.

IAD is also a predictable affliction of the mindset common to an aging population and causes the equally predictable disconnect in perception of consensus between our two largest population segments – the Baby Boomers and the Millennials (both at around 73 million). Specifically, the young are in the prime evolution of idealism, intellectually more inclined to resist conventional wisdom and experiment with new ideas. As we age, there is tendency to rely more on past experience and our established beliefs, rather than entertain new learning. For example, a lack of consensus information and action mandates at the outset of the coronavirus epidemic (e.g., doesn't affect younger people, only elderly people are at risk, and "no worse than regular flu") added to the inevitability of the belated severe but necessary measures since imposed.

A troubling manifestation of IAD is a decline in civility, as belief positions harden and as we move to less face-to-face communication. People say things online that they would never say to someone's face or in public. As physically present interpersonal communications decrease we see a decline in empathy and politeness. Digital platforms do not allow our normal emotional intelligence to assist in filtering one's tone and manner. Digital platforms open what is "said" (typed) to misinterpretation without the given context.

6) Advertising fraud In the information ecosystem is enabling Russian and criminal entities as well as internal special interests to create confusion and a lack of consensus of opinion. The Discovering Truth series illuminated the issue of advertising fraud (dubbed AdFraud by Dr. Fou). The advertising industry evolution to programmatic buying of media via artificial intelligence, starting around 2013, opened the door for fake sites using fake audience coding to attract advertising revenue. While the industry has taken action to reduce AdFraud, it has not slowed proliferation of fake sites with fake content and made-up audience data.

In Episode #4 of Discovering Truth, Facebook confirmed the presence of Russian misinformation on their platform during the 2016 election. Facebook specifically identified the Internet Research Agency in Russia, also known in Russian internet slang as "Trolls," as the purchaser of ads on Facebook. US intelligence agencies warn that this attack persists, yet there is still no consensus that it exists or is influencing anyone's beliefs. Facebook acknowledged our information channels are being corrupted and without consensus such information continues to damage governments, industries, social discourse and affects our security. Cyber security researcher Dr. Fou states: "Millions of dollars of brands' digital ad spend are going to propaganda and news sites like Brietbart, Newsmax, etc."

Recently, WhiteOps a fraud detection firm, uncovered a large-scale ad fraud scheme caught stealing dollars from highly lucrative streaming video ads. The addresses of the servers used in the fraud scheme traced back to ISPs in Russia, but were disguised to appear to come from the United States. This fraud scheme was the largest of its kind, thus far with approximately 1.9 billion ad requests per day in January 2020, equivalent to $60 million per day.

Indicated Actions

The motivation for Discovering Truth is to help us understand ourselves better and to become more aware of how we are processing information. Important next steps are:

1) Acknowledge how we are all subject to our own self-restriction of ideas and how our perception of truth can be manipulated by the diet of information we intake.

2) Enhance our ability to use critical analysis and foster healthy exchanges of ideas to better determine truth. As Norm Levy said in Episode #7: "We must become our own fact checkers."

3) We each share the responsibility to make the process of communicating with each other more respectful, civil and satisfying.

4) The US communication industry must find a way to collaborate with government cyber security to self-regulate the information ecosystem to protect us from false, harmful and dangerous purveyors of information. The challenge of accomplishing this while retaining our freedom of speech ethic on today's information highway is really no different in principle than earlier challenges in radio and television that also exhibited questions of truth and regulation of content by publishers and broadcasters.

My thanks to my wife Kate for her wise counsel and editing help. Thanks also to the guests who contributed to the Discovering Truth podcast series and to those who will help with this initiative going forward. As so many of our guests have said there hardly seems to be a better time for us to discover truth.

Tim Love
April 22, 2020

EXHIBIT I

Discovering Truth Podcast Series Table of Contents

Table of Contents	**Air Date**	**Minutes**
Introduction Compendium – Introduction to Series/Overview Episodes #1-17	Mar 26	52
Episode #1 Series Introduction with **Tim Love**	Aug 3	36
Episode #2 The Role of Leadership: **John Pepper ,** former Chrm P&G and Disney	Sept 30	27
Episode #3 Truth & Ethics with **Wally Snyder**- Institute for Advertising Ethics	Nov 3	24
Episode #4 Truth on Facebook: **Will Platt-Higgins**, VP Global Partnerships	Nov 18	36
Episode #5 Truth about Climate Change with **Paul Polman,** former CEO Unilever	Dec 19	30
Episode #6 Truth: Across Generations- **Joseph Plummer,** Professor Columbia U	Jan 6	31
Episode #7 Advice for Discovering Truth with **Norm Levy** former Adv Devlmnt P&G	**Jan 15**	23
Episode #8 Truth and Millennials with **Laurence Norjean,** CEO Norstar Media	**Jan 29**	27
Episode #9 Truth:& Brand Safety and TAG with **Mike Zaneis** CEO TAG	**Jan 29**	22
Episode #10 Truth & Am. Advertising Federation **Steve Pacheco** CEO AAF	Feb 3	28
Episode #11 Truth & Creativity with **Keith Reinhard** Chairman Emeritus DDB	**Feb 11**	33
Episode #12 Truth & World Federation of Advertisers- **Stephan Loerke** CEO	Feb 18	28
Episode #13 Truth and Advertising Fraud, **Dr Augustine Fou** CEO	Feb 28	45
Episode #14 How A Good Neighbor Sees Us **Rene Leclerc** -former CEO Palm/Canada	Mar 6	28
Episode #15 Truth & Heart of America- **Bill Halamandaris** Founder HOA Foundation	Mar 10	**38**
Episode #16 Marketing in the Time of Virus- Internationalist's **Deborah Malone**	Mar 18	31
Episode #17 Truth and Women's Equality with **Joanne Huskey**	Mar 24	**36**

Here is the link for all episodes: https://www.spreaker.com/show/lifes-lessons-unleashing-your-full-poten
      (this link will work regardless of what type of device you are using)

Where You Can Also Listen to Series
The *Discovering Truth* Series is available on the following podcast sources:

Apple Podcast App	**Spotiify**	**iHeart Radio**	**Google Podcasts**
Spreaker	**Castbox**	**Deezer**	

EXHIBIT II

Presidential Tweets 2015-2020   (77 million Followers)

Source: Google.com Tweetbinder.com

	# of Tweets	# Per Day
Candidacy		
Jun 2015-Nov 6 2016	7,794	15.2
Transition		
Nov 9,2016-Jan 19. 2017	364	5.1
Presidency Year I		
1st 6 mos	1,027	5.7
2nd 6 mos	1,576	8.6
Presidency Year II		
1st 6 mos	1,472	8.1
2nd 6 mos	2,146	11.7
Presidency Year III		
1st 6 mos 1/19-7/19	2,814	15.6
2nd 6 mos 7/19-1/20	5,151	28.1

Source: Trump Twitter Archive, Wikipedia

Presidential Tweets

So-Called Liberal Media	_____ l _____	**So-Called Conservative Media**
CNN		FOXNews
Huffington Post .com		Breitbart.com
New York Times.com		Western Journal.com
Politico.com		Wall Street Journal.com
Slate.com		Drudge Report
Washington Post		New York Post
NBC News /MSNBC		The Atlantic
ABCNews.com		Daily Caller
Daily Kos		Washington Examiner.com
Daily Wire.com		NewsMax.com
Salon.com		theepochtimes.com
Time		Bizpacreview.com
New Yorker		Rush Limbaugh.com
The Daily Beast		TheBlaze.com
Politifact.com		National Review.com
Alternet.org		Townhall.com
Credoaction.com		Hannity.com
Thinkprogress.org		InfoWars.com

Source: newrevere.com ,backwardtimes, rightwingnews

Device Security

In October 2018 the New York Times reported that Trump still uses his personal iPhones for phone calls, even though his aides and US Intelligence officials have warned him that Russian and Chinese spies are listening.