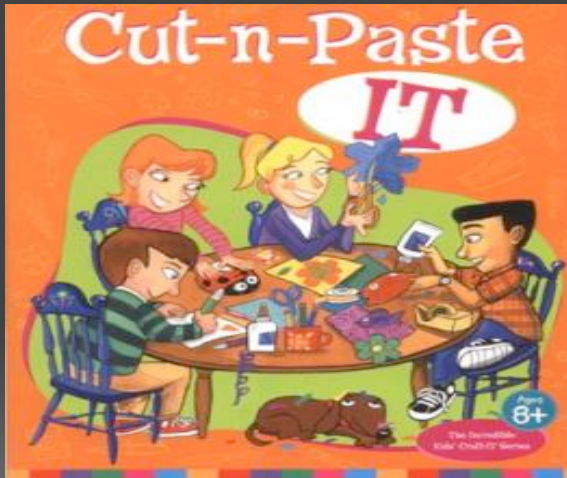


# Trolls, Spin, and the Boundaries of Trust

Chapter 9

# Cut and Paste, Right and Wrong



People used to clip out news articles from a paper or magazine and mail it to someone. Now we can simply copy it digitally and send it along.

The problem is when we cut and paste text, we can get into serious trouble. Cutting of certain text can remove important information or even completely change the meaning of something.

Famous case of cut and paste was with Mary Schmich a columnist for the Chicago Tribune. She wrote a graduation speech she would have given if asked and it circulated around the internet as a real MIT commencement address given by Kurt Vonnegut.

A worse case of cutting and pasting was that of Avi Rubin, a computer scientist and election judge of the 2004 Maryland Primary. He was very critical of the voting machines, and wrote a long article that both stated his objections with the machine and some positive remarks. His words were completely taken out of context by supporters of the bad machines.

Dan Gillmor, the author of the book, described an instance when he was misquoted and misrepresented. He wrote a satiric column that quoted a Microsoft worker admitting to illegal business practices and a spokesman

# New Ways to Mislead

## Fonda Speaks To Vietnam Veterans At Anti-War Rally



Actress And Anti-War Activist Jane Fonda Speaks to a crowd of Vietnam Veterans as Activist and former Vietnam Vet John Kerry (LEFT) listens and prepares to speak next concerning the war in Vietnam (AP Photo)



During the 2004 presidential election, Johnny Kerry ran into some trouble when some websites and newspapers published a photo of him and Jane Fonda. The picture was of them at a 1970's rally protesting the Vietnam war. It turned out the picture was fake and doctored but it showed how easy it was to manipulate public opinion.

There is an increasing use of doctored video. Many televised sporting events to show advertising digitally inserted in. For example, stadium walls that are really blank. Another example is the backdrops of settings behind news anchors are now often inserted electronically.

A few specific examples are in 1999 when Dan Rather, a CBS newscast, anchored from Times square included in his background advertisements on billboards that were digitally added in. CBS didn't think they did anything wrong do you?

A more severe example is that of Jayson Blair. He was a writer for the New York Times and wrote and was later caught made up stories. It is scary to think that readers trusted him. If we the people are getting used to this kind of trickery are we in trouble?

# Who's Talking, And Why?



In 2000, Mark Simeon Jakob put out a fake press release that sent the stock down of a company after many news sources took it seriously. He made over 200,000\$ by selling the stock short. He was later caught and sentenced to prison.

How much has this case differ from all the chat rooms and forums that have grown very popular recently? Now schemers work very hard putting information out and then selling it or buying it.

Investment forums can also be a good source of information. For example, angry employees can post legal inside information that foreshadows bad times to come for shareholders. In addition, smart analysts will post certain information in forums that the pros missed. As Gillmor says "To dismiss all online information out of hand is as foolish as ignoring it entirely- but the failure to do one's homework before making a serious decision may be the most foolish mistake of all." Do you agree with him, why or why not?

During the 2004 presidential election, John Kerry's campaign took a hit when a rumor started that he had an affair, yet there was absolutely no evidence of it. The rumor got started and gained momentum on Matt Drudge's website. While it was clear that Drudge started the rumor, one of the internet's greatest feature is the ability to remain anonymous. For example, a person who holds different political views than other members in the town mav or government officials need to be able to contact

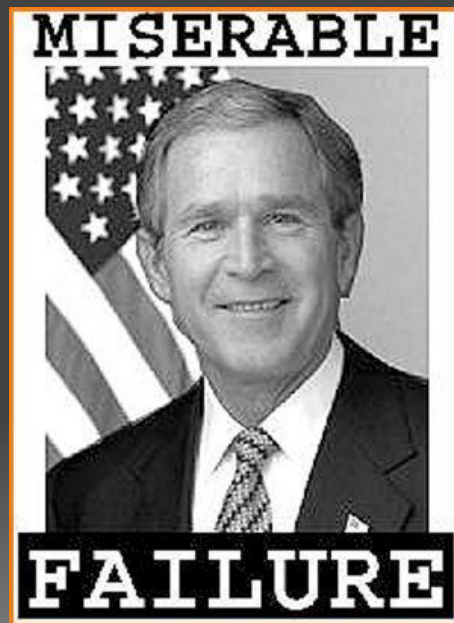
# Trolls and Other Annoyances



The website slashdot has been dealing with trolls for years. Slashdot takes information from all over the internet and the editors select the best stories and publish them on the homepage with a short summary and a hyperlink. The website also invites readers to share their opinions with comments online. A normal story will receive around 250 comments. The Slashdot team constantly has to fix the website because of all the trolls who try and often clog the site with inappropriate and irrelevant postings. The trolls ruin the experience of the website for everyone.

What is a troll? According to Ward Cunningham's wiki, "a troll is deliberately crafted to provoke others with the intention of wasting their time and energy. A troll is a time thief. To troll is to steal from people." How would you deal with a troll if you worked for slashdot? Would you ignore him and let him/her keep posting, or would you ban them from the website?

# Spin Patrol



According to wikipedia, spinning is "putting events or other facts, especially of those with political or legal significance, into cocontexts favoring oneself or one's client or cause, at least in comparison to opponents. Newsmakers and their PR legions have been spinning us since the media became a way to get information to the public, and we've been alternately falling for it or resisting it all this time."

There is harmless, amusing, and ethically challenged methods of spinning. Bombing is a harmless form of spinning. Goggle bombing as Gillmor says is "a method of connecting a word or phrase to a specific web site through the google search engine." An example of this is when a group of google bombers got the words "miserable failure" to connect to George w. Bush's bio on the White House site. Supporters of Bush retaliated by pointing Kerry's page to "waffles." If google doesn't prevent this they will lose some credibility. Do you agree with this statement? Or do you believe that google bombing is a harmless prank?



# Citizen Reporters to The Rescue



because there are so many citizen reporters questioning what other people say, the truth is always revealed.

Kaycee Nicole created a blog to discuss life, illness and death. As time passed she grew very sick she created a large community where 1000's of people visited her blog in 2000 and 2001. They would post messages of comfort both for each other and her. Together they researched her disease to help find a way to make her better. It worked for a little bit and Kaycee recovered temporarily. She later became sick again and died because of Leukemia. However on May 18, 2001 a blogger from Meltafilter posted the questions "is it possible that Kaycee did not exist?" A small group of online denizens discovered after relentless work that Kaycee Nicole was a hoax. This group accomplished investigative journalism. It was amazing because they were not professionals, they were strangers who came together online and solved a mystery. Do you know of any other hoaxes?

# A Flight To Quality?



Do you believe that major newspapers try hard to be accurate and fair? Do you trust that the typical front page of the Journal has been well reported, written and edited?

As Big Media participates in this new online news, it takes risk that could hurt its credibility. Gillmor believes that eventually someone is going to break through the security of a major media web site and post some type of "news" that is completely false. Do you agree with him? If this happens will it change the media's trust equation? Will it have a long-lasting impact?



# Plain Old Common Sense



Being a reporter involves a few basic practices

When something is worth reporting, verify it, or quote credible people who should know, or go to the source. If you post a link on your blog but don't know if its completely true, state that. Learn what sources to trust, and which ones not to trust. For example, trust the Times for than a supermarket tabloid.

Remember this: If your mother says she loves you, check it out.