Episode 68: Dan Faltesek

# KL: Katie LinderDF: Dan Faltesek

# KL: You’re listening to “Research in Action”: episode sixty-eight.

# [intro music]

# Segment 1:

# KL: Welcome to “Research in Action,” a weekly podcast where you can hear about topics and issues related to research in higher education from experts across a range of disciplines. I’m your host, Dr. Katie Linder, director of research at Oregon State University Ecampus. Along with every episode, we post show notes with links to resources mentioned in the episode, full transcript, and an instructor guide for incorporating the episode into your courses. Check out the shows website at ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast to find all of these resources.

On this episode, I’m joined by Dr. Dan Faltesek, Assistant Professor of Social Media, New Media Program in the School of Arts and Communication at Oregon State University. Dan’s work connects the structural factors that confine social media companies and the actual interfaces of social networks. He explores how court decisions, technical standards, and financing shape online experience.

Thanks for joining me, Dan.

**DF:** Great to be here!

**KL:** So a lot of your research focuses on new media, so I think we should start out with a definition of new media. What does that mean to you and your research?

**DF:** New media. It’s an interesting term because it slides a lot. So the sort of history book date I’ll give you, is new media after January, 1993. Now you say, Dan, why January, 1993? Two reasons, and not least of which was the inauguration of a new president and all the current events of 1993, but first the introduction of the mosaic web browser. The University of Illinois introduced this new web browser which allowed to combine the text, internet and the picture in the internet. So it was the first time we had what y’all would consider the internet. Second set of reasons is this is just when www surpasses Gopher. And to mention another fine big ten university, the University of Minnesota, their mascot is the golden gopher, so the Gopher web Protocol. So you see these changes in 1993, so if you’re looking for a benchmark date, there you go. Um what we usually mean by new media are the sort of technologies folks are using to make contact with each other, to inscribe information, and we’re interested in the ones that are just emerging now. You could say it’s the internet in after, so not television, not telephone. But that gets tricky, right? Because you know I teach a class on mobile phone, mobile telepathy is really important. Uh augmented reality is interesting and important. So what do we do with this idea of even a media having some kind of essential nature? I don’t know if it makes that much sense, so our on campus program is known as Digital Communication Art, which is a mouth full, and maybe aging worse than new media did as a degree name. So short story long, it’s generally a term that means what’s new and what’s changing. And so when we talk about what about we do in our unit, we talk about the study of change, and the management of change as a student learning outcome. So for me what that means is social networks. So really 2004 and after, because I’m not really involved in Myspace studies. There was a wonderful group of folks, doing Myspace stuff between about 2004 and 2007. I primarily work on things like Facebook and Twitter, and a little bit Pinterest.

**KL:** Alright so I’m really curious especially given the changing nature of media, what are some of the research questions you’re focusing on right now? What’s kind of the trajectory of your research and has it really changed over time because of all these new changes in media?

**DF:** Absolutely. My trajectory has changed from when I started grad school. I got to grad school, and I had just been working for a Vox affiliate doing fill in weather, and production and whatever else, and so I was really hot to trot about the idea of television studies. And so I’m working on T.V., and T.V. finance and I’m doing research on world wrestling entertainment. So I wrote this conference paper where I was looking at the way they have employees, but kind of don’t have employees and how that might affect the company, the international portability of the text and whatever else, and I ran into a problem. I just couldn’t watch enough T.V. to do the sort of textual hermeneutic critique. I was very interested in the marketing, and the sort of transport of the information and the computer science aspect of studying some of these networks, but the idea of just kind of sitting down and watch 179 episodes of Dragnet, and then trying to write the canonical book about detective shows was just not working for me. And so I started doing other kinds of work, so bringing in ideas from computer science, and bringing in ideas about user interaction to media studies. At the time those were not necessarily the ways people did that research. The dominant paradigm for new media research at that time was largely user centered ethnography. So it was folks going out and interviewing users, and seeing how users felt and thought about systems, and they wrote some really great book. You know, but I like infrastructures. That’s what I was working on with television. It wasn’t the shows that excited me it was; who sold this to who? Why and for how much? How did they deliver the show? Stuff like that. What I’m really interested in, there are two sort of trajectories that I’m on. One set is the work on design interfaces, so it obviously matters what the media says. To be specific it matters how it looks. What buttons are there, the look of the buttons, where they are, what those buttons let you do, what shows up in a feed and in what order. All of that matters. For me, I’m not the biggest interpreter of text. I have one side of my research where I’m using computer software to scrape information off of social networks. To use machine learning to say “Hey what were people talking about on Twitter yesterday?” Because what I want to do is say go back to the social, political, and economical factors and say “How do these factors impact the kind of text that got created?” And so I’m working on these ways of being able to quantitatively model what the data said yesterday. So that’s one of the sets of things I’m doing. The other set is the infrastructural side of the universe so tracking down how corporations change like their Use of Names Policy, how they deal with intellectual property, how they talk to the Stock Market. You know, every quarter Twitter files a form with the Securities Exchange Commission that has all kinds of fascinating tids and bids all throughout it, and so you can collect those and look at how the corporation behaves, and you can start to put on one track how it looks, what it feels like and who’s using it with those other sets of things like what does the stock market want? How are their lawyers talking to them? Is there an international incident? You can start to get a sense, and this is what I really want to know, I want to know how these broader, and sort of economic ideas and sort of artistic visions of the world corporations have, how do those impact the kind of media they bring to consumers, citizens, however we want to imagine the user or the audience. And then how do those folks change the way they view the world based on those social media platforms? Vice versa, you know, it’s all a feedback loop. You know, media corporations care a lot about what you think. They pay thousands if not millions of dollars to know what you want, so they can try to give that to you exactly how you want. Alright? So it’s not just them making you think something, but they’re desperately wondering what you’re thinking do that they can try to make something that you like. In classes I call this The Princess Bride problem. Each side is trying to figure out what the other side knows and what they want, and they go back and forth and back and forth and back and forth. I won’t spoil that scene for you if you haven’t seen The Princess Bride. [Who hasn’t seen The Princess Bride at this point?] I would say about half the class usually hasn’t [Wow, well it’s a generational thing that’s for sure.} It’s like the most important movie.

**KL:** Alright well we will link to it in the show notes for people who want to learn more about it, and of course the original book as well, which is excellent. Um, so I’m sold. This is fascinating as you’re chatting about it, but what I’m hearing too is that your work seems very highly interdisciplinary, so I’d love to hear about the areas you’re drawing from the most. Are there certain things you find yourself going back to again and again?

**DF:** So the idea of discipline is very tricky for me, in that I got my Ph.D. in Communications Studies. My undergraduate I majored in Communications Studies and Political Science and I got a minor in Philosophy and took classes and fashion design and just had a great time generally. So Communications Studies is different and interesting because it’s not mass communication. Communications of the mass typically means journalism. Communications Studies has a different sort of history, and when you talk with folks in our field we don’t talk about it as discipline we talk about it as a field with an F. What does that really mean, what’s the distinction? Um so depending on who’s history you believe, and a lot of these people are still alive and can give you an interpretation of these things are field disciplined, academic unit, and budget line item. Whatever works for you? Maybe it started in the 1890’s with some sort of renegade sociologist who were not happy with the sociology of the day. You know, our largest professional association, The National Communication Association started after a walk out from an English convention, because the English literature and writing professors were just not crazy about this speech thing. That it was less than writing, and so they left. So you’ve go these sociologist, you’ve got these rhetoricians coming from literature, you’ve got speech programs, debate teams all of which sort of melt together with pieces of theater art. Then you also have psychologist in the 1930’s and 40’s working on anti-fascism research all coming together to make these communication departments in universities. And so unlike a lot of your 19th century classic social sciences, you know your anthropology, your sociology, economics, political science um all of them except for history and the other one, you have a collected blend of people coming together. One of the major figures in our field was Sam Becker, and what he used to say in terms of admission to graduate school was you just get a really interesting people together, and good things will happen. Now Sam was lucky in that he always got to admit really interesting people, but the problem with this gets to be that we don’t necessarily have a home in traditional social sciences and that can be good and it can be bad. Uh so if you’re looking to solve translational problems like who gets to solve housing in Los Angeles in some time period that for us is a really interesting and important question. That’s like a first level research question. You know, how does the talk about housing affect the housing stock? You know, but we don’t just then have a basic stock of knowledge. There’s no basic communication research. You know, we’re not trying to do research on this big idea of the cognitive, or the mind, or the social, or the human. You know and so we end up with this assemblage of ideas that we take from other disciplines, and groups of people leaving other disciplines who then come and join us. What’s interesting is as those groups leave they’re not recognized by where they came from anymore, so once you’re apart of communication you’re apart of communication. Um so for me, I go back to my basic sort of communications studies wheel house, which is just the study of discourse and the idea that we can study first and foremost how people interact with each other, and specifically speech. Potentially media stuff, like the way that we edit things, the way that we compile visual websites or programs. When I start going outside of my already collective base, things like graphic design, so you know you start looking at the way people talk about page layouts, you can start looking to some degree at the architecture of stuff. Um computer science has incredible that we can bring to bear on our problems, and understand how people design things on the internet, so use your experience research. You know, you can dart out into economics and get the ideas that work for you. Now does that make me an economist? I really don’t know, I’d have to ask an economist and probably depending on the day, they’d have a different answer. As a field, as a group of researchers, as a group of folks educating students, we take the things that we need and we learn the things that we need to try and understand the contemporary situation, and from there you know sometimes we take things that work, and sometimes we take things that don’t work. You know, sometimes we pick up different baggage that we didn’t attend to. You know, it’s not like we standing at the baggage carousel waiting to take every academic idea that comes by, but we do what we can.

**KL:** So it seems to me thatyour work is kind of like a moving target, because there’s constant changes in media I think even in social media. Like new features are coming out and people are interacting with it, certain things close down other things start up. How is that impacting your work? Do you see it as a moving target? Are you trying to just keep up with this stuff as it goes?

**DF:** It is really weird to be on a regular academic book publishing cycle. You know so I’ve been, you know, you go back and forth with an editor, you know you do rewrites, you deal with this sort of months long wait for comments or even years long at times. By the time your article gets to publication your platform may be gone. If I had published about Yik Yak, Yik Yak is just gone, right? You know so if I had invested anytime there it would have been a total sort of loss. As a person who studies new media, and I especially study social media, you have got to just stick with it, and you can just stay by your duck pond. Right? Just because that’s where your ducks are now, they’re migrating constantly and by the time they land they’re probably going to be flying lizards anyway. You have to think about where things are going, and really you have to focus on the factors. You have to focus not so much on the nouns, on the is what this is today to try to lock it down. You have to focus on the sort of verbs. You have to think about the actions that are driving the transformation. So when we start talking, I want to research the social logic that caused people to use Yik Yak. If you walk onto Yik Yak itself, you’re going to get in trouble, it’s going to get stale. But if you look at the entire selection of applications like Jodel, Yik Yak, any number of other things and then try to understand the social logic and the cultural motive that got people into them, then you can keep your research going. So you have to think about the actions and the movement of this sort of world of media. You can’t just lock in on the media as it is. This I think can sometimes be hard for folks who are very use to trying to walk in and really test a specific construct. Right? Because it would be very difficult if not impossible to try to come back and hit the same research in the exact same way just again and again, because the object that we are researching is not timeless, it is changing constantly. You have to be ready to look at different research studies, by different people over the course of years, and look for the thread that unites them, and then in many ways as a researcher to reconstruct the sort of disciplinary or argumentative trajectory, because there just isn’t going to be time or resources or simply labor to have the kind of academic discussion your used to in other disciplines. To give you some sense of size, our largest convention as about 8,000 folks at it annually, it’s called the National Communication Association, it happens every November. Compared to other academic fields, they dwarf ours, and so you know, I don’t know what to do in a world where we might have 5 people who work on something, and that’s a lot by our standards.

**KL:** Well I feel like we’re just getting started here, we’re going to take a brief break. When we come back we’re going to hear a little bit more from Dan about the politics of social media, back in a moment.

# Segment 2:

**KL:** So Dan, I know one of the areas of your research is focusing on social media and looking at the politics of social media, and I’d like to hear more about the political facts that both influence social media in terms of how it’s built, but also how it’s consumed. What can you tell us about that?

**DF:** So when you’re reading about social media, you get a really sort of negative vibe from folks. They say, you know you “These kids. All their doing is reading news articles on their Facebook, they’re not reading what their local new person wants them to read.” And I’m just like stop there, okay? You’re having a problem with kids because they’re reading the newspaper on a cell phone, and they just happened to choose the *New York Times* and the *Guardian* rather than whatever local paper you’re used to. And so you have a lot of really interesting changes coming in the sort of ecology of information that is available for a person, and everyday life. There’s all of this information. People have way more access to different kinds of newspapers and news sources than they did before. And you have these sort of organizations that are curating the feed for you, and they would really love it if a lot of these new organizations then would partner with them or maybe buy advertising from them. And so you have these fights with regular old folks just trying to figure out, are they a good socially conscious recipient of information. Are they a responsible user of journalism? And you have these organizations that are trying to figure out “well what kind of information should we put in the feed?” Before I go back to talking about everyday folks trying to figure out how to get their news, we got to figure out the politics of these companies like Facebook, and how they deal with what ends up on their news feed. So the news feed. Uh about a 10 year old idea these days, you have to have a central place where an algorithm curates together the stories that they think would be relevant to you. Now this doesn’t necessarily mean every story, this doesn’t mean every picture of lunch that somebody posted today, but what it is a combination of things that seem to be relevant. Now some of these things as you know, are not relevant. Some of these things use the sort of slippery term, the dreaded “Fake News”, the news that’s not accurate, not trustworthy, and not reliable. Professor Zimdars out on the east coast collated quite a list of these sorts of sights and received incredible pushback from both folks who like them and from folks who you know, run them, because is their perspective, they aren’t necessarily fake news. And so I don’t think that’s necessarily that useful of a term, if you think somethings fake, it’s going to be fake news for you right? So you’d say “Well why would these organizations include this information on their sight?” If they’re trying to build the best possible feed to inform people in all the ways that they can, why would they leave information that they know to be troubling. You know, why they would let trolls do their thing. I mean for years twitter has been overrun by folks who are just mean, and nasty and awful and you start to say to yourself, Is this really Justice Brandeis and Justice Holmes were talking about in these sort of free speech opinions near the 20th century. Is this the sort of stuff they were looking to protect? You know, people intentionally being mean to each other or working against truth? And so, you have these companies then who have these sort of internal politics about speech might mean, and how processes of social judgement work. When I mean process of social judgement I mean you need to slow down and think, if something is wrong. How did people make it go away in the past? Well they ignored it, right? Or they didn’t buy into the advertising in the paper, or they just said “Yep this is ridiculous” and moved on. And so you have these companies then saying you know, can they exercise editorial discretion on any of this content. You know, can they exercise community management to get rid of these sort of very troubling users, and you know they have in many cases some very strong libertarian views that say no, that they can’t, that at the end of the day it will all just sort itself out. I think one of the things we’ve really seen is that they don’t. That the platforms just cool, they change, they lose their intimacy. And the intimacy is what I think is really, really important. Danielle Allen wrote a book called *Talking to Strangers.* It’s a wonderful book of political theory, and the argument it makes is that you have to have some willingness to go out there and engage with folks who are very strange and very different from you. Early in the life of social networks there was a lot of this sort of stranger sensibility, and as time has gone on I think we’ve lost that. When I look at older research about the internet, about participatory culture, about distributed and collected intelligence, it assumes that the intimacy is there. And so now in 2017, this is after the love is gone, right? There’s none of that intimacy left, everyone feels exposed, and to some degree they don’t feel safe anymore. They know that their constantly being watched. That if they put their real feelings out there that trolls are going to bounce right back on them on the Twitter, and on Facebook they know it’s a garden of just their friends and family, and so it doesn’t have that sort of limitless, strange possibilities to it anymore. And so there’s a politics of social media that has to do with the corporations and how they make decisions, but also the politics in terms of how we conceive ourselves as political agents in choosing to engage, and persuade, and converse with folks we necessarily know to be safe on things like Facebook, or getting out there and entering into a lagoon of trolls on things like Twitter, and the kinds of differences and changes of emotional energy that come from that. You know, you can go on Facebook and get emotional support and feel better. You can go on Twitter and just feel crushed, and a person who isn’t good at Instagram might mistake Instagram for real life, when in reality it’s just a stream of highly curated images inviting you to curate right with them.

**KL:** So I’m curious, because I think you’re touching on this, based on your research, what are some of the tangible risks of engaging with social media? You’re talking about trolls, I’m wondering if you want to elaborate on that a little bit? Because I think there are a lot of people who are very reticent about getting into social media and especially from a personal professional perspective are unsure how to engage.

**DF:** What’s fascinating to me about social networks and folks getting out there is you can really get some great social support by having your friends and family there. The technical term we have for it is ambient awareness. That you can construct a sort of awareness of a larger social network, you can feel as though you are supported. There’s some research that suggest that folks who have the greatest support needs, who are the most disadvantaged can actually get the most support this way compared with other folks. So there are these possibilities that you can access. At the same time, social media is not the same as it was two years ago. It’s not the same as it was six months ago, well more like eight months ago, and I’m talking about the election. I was doing a public event in town in November, and we were talking about what will happen the next day. And most of the folks thought the outcome of the election would be the opposite direction of what it was. My position was people are going to require some time to cool down, but they’ll be excited. If the other thing happens they’ll stop sharing, and why would they stop sharing? Well we know on social networks that when a media event begins people become way less interactive, they become way less creative. They are far more likely to go to the sources of authority and take messages that are already out there and try to broadcast them. So it becomes a broadcast model. As people do this, if they perceive there selves to now be in the seventh or eighth month of a massive ongoing media event, the sort of creativity, the vivacity, the engagement, the energy that would have been there in the good old days of 2013, may just be gone. So one set of risks are you can go on these social networks and it just isn’t as good and happy and enjoyable as it once was. Now the broader, older concern was called context collapse. Which is to say folks might make bad choices, not understanding the rules of the forum that they had entered into. When I deal with undergraduates now this is not a problem. They are like, yes, we understand that everybody sees our Facebook, they understand that we are in twitter, they have all kinds of very complicated social rituals to ensure that they can do some of this work without being detected. There phrase you’re looking for here, the secret code word is you have to know someone’s Sinsta, so the Sinsta on the Insta. What that means, S-I-N, sin. It’s there Sinstagram. So you have you regular Instagram, which is for your employers, your family anyone else, and that’s got your pictures being like “Wow I am so good at studying.” Then you have your Sinsta, which is your pictures from your parties and whatever else. These all typically have different names, and different schools. All kinds of things. So students today, you know, it’s not that they are not aware of how these things work, or professionalism, or anything else. If anything they’re hyperaware. What will that mean for folks when people who are 14 or 15 years old, have gotten into the sort of, and this is outside my area, this is a question I have for other researchers., I’d like them to work on because I want to read their journal articles and site them. I want to know what it’s like for folks who feel like then they’ve been on stage since they were 14, and who feel like they couldn’t go to these places for the sort of emotional support, you know, and sort of fun and extended socializing that folks did in the 90’s, and instead they’re all now not something you do because you want to, but they’re something you do because you have to. They expose you to trolls, and they expose you to visibility, and everything’s fraud, and you have to be anxious about them. You’d say, “Well just opt out.” Well if you’re young and don’t have a social network platform, people are very suspicious. You know, you can’t opt out.

**KL:** So I’d like to shift focus to a slightly different generation, and specifically to academics because you are an academic who works in this area [Apparently]. Yes, and so I’d love to hear, how do you think academics should be engaging on social media? Many of them are not in a situation where they have been doing this sense their teen years and are not reticent to kind of engage. Some are jumping in, I mean not everybody is reticent, um but what are some of your thoughts on that? How should we be engaging as academics?

**DF:** Yeah, for public engagements on social networks I kind of, I’m in a different spot, because you know in the 90’s we would get on our AOL Instant Messengers and chat away with each other as teenagers about how we were going to split the workload to write our debate positions. So I would say like, I was a 15 year old just being like, well actually before I got AOL Instant Messenger, you know getting on the system and being like “Let’s chat about these things.” It was all very comfortable, right? When the new social networks came, um if you even consider AOL Messenger to be a social network, but that’s a question for another day. Um you know, I’m very comfortable, right? So I have my profiles out there, my twitter out there, and whatever else. A thing that can be really important for academics these days especially, is to think about what academia and the kind of impact you can make. You know, if you’re someone who does work on something with real public stakes, and you can be engaged publically in very measured sort of way, and be able to release, basically publish your own tid bits about your research and Ideas, that can be really good, and useful, and interesting. I mean I follow, when I see my friends post really good stuff on Facebook, I save the links. It really broadens my ability to collect new and interesting ideas. Frankly, I trust them to bring me the cool new stuff, much more than I trust journalist to. You know, they have a very different selection of ideas about what they think is cool and new, and you know, a lot of times I am just not that interested in what they’re saying. The only things that can be helpful for academics to do especially is journalist a lot of times are looking to find sources in non-crisis times. They want to get to know people and sources and get articles and columns from folks like every week, and that doesn’t mean they’re going to publish them, but then when they do need something they can come to you and you can help improve the quality of the story. So I would actually say it’s a part of your role as a researcher to disseminate your research. For those of y’all with the sort of National Science Foundation funded research, this is why they have a dissemination aspect that they want to make sure this research doesn’t just stay in a lab, they need it to get out here and have the connections get made so things can take that next step. And so what I would say is, you should probably have a profiles, even if you don’t ever plan to use them. You need to have the placeholder in your name, because let’s say that something does happen, and all of a sudden you do become internet famous, you want control of that profile with your name on it. View it as even just an insurance policy, then you can get out there and just start making your arguments, even if it’s a part of your work interpreting the sort of things that you see in the news, even if that’s just for your friends and family, getting your perspective can be really useful. You know, and I love that, right? I love having lawyers explain the lawyer stuff to me. You know I like hearing scientist put their spin on the lawyer stuff, or the science stuff, be like this article is wrong. This thing that this person in this magazine picked up on in this sort of gladwellian style, this is not a consensus research finding that they’re using, this is something out there f**ro**m a third level journal. Those little bits of context can really tell the story for folks and the sort of relationships then that you can build with potentially with the you know, the press for other people, can really help expand, can really help diffuse your research out there. Which I would guess is probably why the research do. I would guess. I mean do some people not want their research read? [I guess that’s possible]. I mean anything’s possible [Anything’s possible]. I mean I’m glad people read my research I guess. Yeah I like it, I hope they use it. I hope they live wonderful lives.

**KL:** Well Dan, you’ve given us so many things to think about here. I want to thank you so much for taking the time to come into the studio today, for coming on this show. Thanks so much for sharing about your work!

**DF:** It’s been awesome! Thank you!

**KL:** And thanks so much to our listeners for joining us for this week’s episode of research in action. I’m Katie Linder, and we’ll be back next week with a new episode.

# Show notes with links to resources mentioned in the episode, a full transcript, and an instructor’s guide for incorporating the episode into your courses, can be found at the show’s website at [ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast](http://www.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast).

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# Bonus Clip #1:

**KL:** In this first bonus clip for Episode 68 of the “Research in Action” podcast, Dr. Dan Faltesek discusses the responsibility of social media platforms to respond to trolls – take a listen.

**KL:** So Dan, you’ve talked a little bit about politics of social media. Trolls are a big part of that, as you talked a little bit about it before, and you would think that the corporations behind social media would want to stop the trolls, but I get the sense that that may not be the case. So, can you talk a little bit about that? What have you found?

**DF:** So, let’s set the stage. It’s 1995 and the internet is a relatively new thing. So, there are all kinds of message boards and websites in sort in the “bad old days” of the internet. And we get to have this problem: people start putting defamatory, false information about each other on the internet. And there’s a famous case about this involving a fella by the name of Zeran, who ends up with basically his life destroyed by people saying that he said these things that he never said. And so he sues AOL. And this is one of many suits in this time period where folks are looking for defamation judgements about things that are happening on the internet because the internet is a publisher after all. So, Congress in 1996 changed the standards for what a publisher meant in the context of the internet, and the reason they would do this is that they didn’t want to make AOL a prodigy, that dominant sort of internet platforms at the time, liable for all of the stuff that happened on the internet. You know, you just think about what kind of goldmine this would have been for defamation cases. You know, they would have been happening all of the time. How could these corporations that ran the internet – how could they even keep up? You know, just the idea of having that many editors. Would you have to impose like a corporate prior restraint on the internet or something else? So they received a sort of blanket immunity for their function as internet service providers. Now, there is a broader question, which is: at what point do you switch from being this sort of protected ISP to being an unprotected sort of newspaper? So, if you were a newspaper website and you publish something defamatory, this would happen with Gawker, although the actual legal mechanism is a little different, um, you know, you could get sued. And it can be bad and you can lose the company and you can lose major judgements. And so, the internet has largely been protected from this by not editing. And so I think there is a degree to which corporations like Facebook, Twitter, and others, have been reticent to do a lot of editing for fear of becoming newspapers. And so, then as you seen a many number of people struggle with this. You know, I have seen a recent Tumblr created by a professor who has received all sorts of threatening and awful communication on the basis of some activism that she was involved in, reports it to Facebook, and Facebook says “this doesn’t violate our community standards”. And so, you say, “Oh, this is a troubling sort of problem.” Part of the dimension could be they’re avoiding to appearing to be an editor. And they also might think that it’s good business to avoid being the editor. For a number of years, Facebook wouldn’t allow you to post pictures, say of breastfeeding, but they would let you put up other kinds of stuff, which was… was troubling. And so you say, “Well, we need some kind of a coherent stance, so we’ll take no stance.” Now, does this mean that you’re going to get the social network that has the sort of the warm feelings that made the early internet and participatory culture possible? Probably not, but for the moment it looks like good strategy. And we’ll have to see as time goes on if these non-intervention policies lead to a stable user-base, and base of attention on social networks – even if that attention is entirely unpleasant.

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# Bonus Clip #2:

**KL:** In this second bonus clip for Episode 68 of the “Research in Action” podcast, Dr. Dan Faltesek shares some strategies to combat fake news – take a listen.

**KL:** Dan, fake news is such a thing right now. I feel like anytime I turn on any kind of new media, there is some discussion of fake news. I wondering if there is anything in your research or that you’ve come across about people trying to stop this? What are some possibilities?

**DF:** The best way to stop fake news is for corporations to detach the sort of short circuit that funded it, and this is already happening. Google, no longer if they believe you have a page that is one of these fake news pages they will not let put Google ads in. This is good, that movement is rolling forward. There are some new things coming next week in the advertising industry that are going to shut down some of this stuff. Another fraud another problem. Now the best thing we can try to do is try to reconstruct something that looks like, or defend the process by which we construct the truth. To some degree this is why academics need to be out in public Tweeting and Facebooking and blogging about their work, because we have to show all of our work in how we come to our conclusions and why people should believe the claims that we’re making in the first place. So Kathleen Hall Jamieson, a wonderful communication researcher, has described this in terms of knowledge certifying institutions. In the past we have this role of newspapers serving the role of knowledge certifying institutions that they would do their sourcing, they would get two on everything, and you could relatively say that if it appeared in the time than it was real knowledge. This to some degree has broken down as folks decide that either they don’t believe what’s in the newspapers, if they challenge the credibility of folks who are in those roles of knowledge certification. So what I would say as academics and researchers, what we can do aside from the letting the ad industry do its work to cut off the flow of money to the fake news sites, is to really be out there and explain the underlying basis of why we know what we know. So you know, you don’t have to be in an epistemology seminar to actually be interested in what a knowledge claim is. For me this feels like second nature, you know communication studies has no traditional disciplinary home. We have no privilege line we think on what the human answer, on what the mind is or what the social is, so we’re always explain why we know what we know and why we think it matters. For professors and everyone else today, it’s not just about saying, “Well this authority says,” or “Science says,” or anything else. You have to explain the underpinnings for why you have the knowledge that you have, and why it matters, and why in these sort of translational moments when people actually consider what to do or what to say or what to think why your insight should be the one they go to. So how do we deal with the problem of fake news? Well you have to cut off its funding. The second thing we have to do is we have to make sure that we are communication our research result in such a way that they cannot be dismissed out of hand, and we can’t communicate them in the structure of an authority claim. You actually have to explain why you know what you know, and frankly that may actually be more interesting for everyone listening along at home. For you to explain what happened to you in your lab. For you to explain what happened out in your field work, or to tell the whole story, and why you used the methods you used, and maybe you might make some new disciplinary friends along the way.

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