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Seven Initial Prominent Sources of All Information Bias Impartiality Types Parsed

ABSTRACT

Ever since information was first operationalized by library science into consumer formats, media bias has been studied from the purview of information gatekeepers who decide what, how, and when to publish based on story importance and factors like circulation. This concept did not include individuals or entities outside of the journalism discipline. With the advent of the internet and a number of social media networks that soon followed, individuals could more effectively release information without waiting for gatekeepers, thus shaping the public's perception regardless of the topic. Scholars offered a theoretical framework for shaping the public's opinion and still other scholars focused on how information could be slanted or partisan. However, these seminal approaches did not operationalize the term information bias in terms of the overall partiality of major sources themselves. Information evaluation tests such as the Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose (CRAAP) and Stop, Investigate, Find, Trace (SIFT) that have been discussed as tools to assess information for bias fall short on the very first step of what to inspect and how to sort. With a gap in the literature sorting through the types of biases can be daunting and confusing. The purpose of this paper is to propose one initial method as the first step to sort information bias regardless of its form, analog or digital, into seven prominent sources each with their own inherent but larger impartiality tied to it. The sources of all information bias to be discussed in alphabetical order are: 1) academic, 2) for-profit, 3) government, 4) hidden agenda, 5) individuals, 6) nonprofit, and 7) watchdog groups.

KEY WORDS

Impartiality. Information Bias. Inspected. Media. Parsed. Sources. Types.

1 Statement of Purpose

Information can be generated by a variety of sources, each with its own purpose, interests, and biases. Understanding the source of information can help individuals evaluate its credibility and potential biases whether they include said information in school essays, in business white papers, or in sharing in social media, for example.[1] With many social networks containing fake news and increasing misinformation, whether information literacy is taught in libraries, at schools, or anyone in the public willing to help people from all walks of life separate fact from fiction, people need to start evaluating information carefully before they subscribe to it and to be most responsible when contributing to civil discourse. But where should people begin to discern biases associated with pieces of information? One way is to separate or parse the information, if you will, into types of higher-level impartiality tied to the authors. But what types of information make sense?

A review of the literature across several disciplines from journalism, media and information literacy to books and media communications reveals that no single study has suggested an overall number or segment of all information impartiality source types, but that the seven to be discussed here have, for the most part been the subject of separate studies of impartiality holding their source category as a separate documented bias. By categorizing information sources in the following seven ways, to view all of the possible most prominent sources of inherent impartiality tied to them, individuals can see the range of perspectives to form their initial opinions of the usefulness of such information as an initial inspection or evaluative step. When tied to bias evaluation tools like CRAAP and SIFT, students and people everywhere can now take the first step in parsing the information so that while other types of biases may later be found, the initial bias type can more immediately identified.[2] After separating such information into any one or more of the seven proposed here, people can drill down deeper to inspect for fallacies and other such tests outside scope of this paper, that can account for information objectivity and its authenticity. Observing the 7 initial sources of prominent bias type categories to follow can, therefore, aid as the initial step in such an evaluation inspection process that undoubtedly relies on critical thinking.

2 Methodology

Using databases such as *ProQuest*, *Digital Dissertations*, the *Elton B. Stephenson Database* (EBSCO), *ERIC*, and *Google Scholar*, a broad range of journals were examined across many disciplines to determine the types of information sources that were initially separated for their use by libraries, students, and researchers using terms like information category history, types of information sources, for example. In February 2023 the popular Artificial Intelligence (AI) tool *ChatGPT* was also used based on numerous scholarly studies it could access. The initial question was: *"Of all the information available anywhere, on and off the internet, what categories have researchers divided it into?"* And while the response listed some source types including primary, secondary, and tertiary to academic, and popular sources like journalistic and media companies to and even grey literature like white papers and technical documents and finally electronic sources, no single study has been conducted nor one that conceptually discussed all seven to follow here. Other search terms for the history of the study of information bias were used as, "information", "organization", "categories", "bias", "partiality", "source", for example.

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[1] See: WINEBURG, S., MCGREW, S., BREAKSTONE, J., ORTEGA, T.: *Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning. Stanford Digital Repository*. Stanford, CA : Stanford University, 2019. [online]. [2022-11-15]. Available at: <https://purl.stanford.edu/fv751yt5934>.

[2] CAULFIELD, M.: *SIFT (The Four Moves)*. [online]. [2023-02-09]. Available at: <https://hapgood.us/2019/06/19/sift-the-four-moves/>.

The results of that search are shown throughout the following literature review. However, even when *ChatGPT* was asked: *"Have sources of all information ever been categorized into these overall types of impartiality studies collectively: academic, for-profit, government, hidden-agenda, individuals, and watch dog groups in one study?"* The answer was "no".[3]

3 Literature

Ever since information was first operationalized by library science into the *Five Laws of Information Accessibility* and into proposed formats such as *Memex*, a hypothetical device as a new way to organize and access information, a precursor to computers and individually accessed databases, but one where users could store their personal preferences and notes about information they read, for example, *Memex* was a proposed way to make connections to various pieces of information to help users discern its meaning.[4] With regard to the *Five Laws* they helped librarians to initially categorize information and these types did recognize academic, commercial (for-profit), non-profit, but hidden agenda was labeled political or social issues and finally individuals were only recognized as users of the information.

As research continued scholars examined ways in which public opinions were shaped by information they consumed. This led to studies on media bias from the purview of information gatekeepers who decide what, how, and when to publish based on story importance and factors like circulation.[5] Thirty years later this continued look at how opinions are swayed in the media turned to information bias itself as well as how artificial intelligence-based algorithms can affect news consumption. In this example from *Digital Threats: Research and Practice*, the authors maintained, *"the shift to consuming news information on SM* [social media] *along with the growing use of AI* [artificial intelligence] *for DPL* [dynamic programming language] *has changed information bias anchoring behaviors."*[6]

This concept of bias associated with specific media outlets continues to be the subject of much debate. But less is known about information bias associated with individuals who also can contribute to national conversations. With the advent of the internet and several social media networks that soon followed, individuals could more effectively release information without waiting for gatekeepers, thus shaping the public's perception regardless of the topic. Entman offered a theoretical framework for shaping the public's opinion.[7] Other scholars focused on how information could be slanted or partisan. [8]

However, these seminal approaches did not operationalize the term information bias nor the sources most prominently tied to overall partiality. With a gap in the literature as well as the dangers of misinformation that can affect people personally and professionally not to mention democratic values that rely on objectivity and authenticity of said information, sorting through the types of biases can be daunting and confusing. Studies have been conducted that discuss impartiality of several of the seven proposed here but each has been singled out for possible impartiality.

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[3]   Author's note: Response to *"With regard to these sources of information, academic, for-profit, government, hidden agenda, individuals, non-profits, and watchdog groups, which one would AI tools like ChatGPT fall under and why?"* (See: *ChatGPT*. (online forum comment). [online]. [2023-02-23]. Available at: <https://www.chatgpt.com>.).

[4]   BUSH, V.: As We May Think. In *The Atlantic Monthly,* 1945, Vol. 176, No. 1, p. 101. See also: RANGANATHAN, S. R.: *The Five Laws of Library Science*. Madras : Madras Library Association, 1931.

[5]   See: HERMAN, E. S., CHOMSKY, N.: *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York, NY : Pantheon Books, 1988.

[6]   DATTA, P., WHITMORE, M., NWANKPA, J. K.: A Perfect Storm: Social Media News, Psychological Biases, and AI. In *Digital Threats: Research and Practice*, 2021, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 15:5.

[7]   See: ENTMAN, R. M.: Modern Racism and the Images of Blacks in Local Television News. In *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 1990, Vol. 7, No. 4, p. 332-345.

[8]   See: BAUM, M. A.: Sex, Lies, and War: How Soft News Brings Foreign Policy to the Inattentive Public. In *American Political Science Review*, 2002, Vol. 96, No. 1, p. 91-109.

For example, in 1999, Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Paul Waldman published a book called *The Press Effect: Politicians, Journalists, and the Stories that Shape the Political World*, in which they discussed different sources of information and their potential biases. While they did not explicitly categorize sources into the prominent types this paper proposes, they provided a detailed analysis of the ways in which different sources of information can shape public opinion from a journalistic purview. *"In examining sources, we have found that journalists draw on four major types: official, partisan, outside the process, and personal. The personal and outside sources add a valuable dimension to political coverage, bringing to bear perspectives that official and partisan sources are unlikely to offer. However, journalists must be careful not to overuse these sources, or they risk reinforcing a sense of cynicism among the public about politics and government."*[9]

In 2016, David M. Croteau and William Hoynes published a book called, *Media/Society: Industries, Images, and Audiences.* Here the two authors discussed different types of media organizations and the ways in which they are funded and regulated. They also separated the types of sources journalists might turn to for their stories. *"Journalists turn to a variety of sources to generate news stories. These sources can include government officials, corporate executives, experts in various fields, celebrities, activists, and ordinary people. However, the selection of sources is not always neutral, and can reflect the biases and interests of the media organizations themselves, as well as the larger societal and political forces that shape news coverage."*[10]

In 2022, Jayes et al. published a paper called *The impact of hyperlinks, skim reading and perceived importance when reading on the Web,* in which they discuss the ways in which the amount of information helps make better decisions even if that information is irrelevant for the decision. *"Firstly, we predicted that longer sentences would be rated as more important than shorter sentences due to the so-called **information bias**. **Information bias** is the **belief** that the more **information** that can be acquired to make a decision, the better, even if that extra **information** is irrelevant for the decision."*[11]

Hence, while there isn't one definitive scholarly paper that categorizes sources of information into these seven: academic, for-profit, government, hidden agenda, individuals, non-profits, and watchdog groups, Bean had proposed the concept as recently as of 2022 and many researchers have written about sources, how they are used and the types of biases that can be inherently associated with some as well as the individuals who seek or otherwise choose to interact with such information.[12] These examples provide insights into the ways in which different sources of information can be shaped by public opinion and the factors that influence the production and dissemination of information in general.

Finally, traditionally libraries served as a great place to start as reference experts have had already vetted much of the information as well as the information in their collections available to their patrons. When COVID hit and schools and libraries shut down, students as well as the public had little choice but to investigate information on their own as well as be responsible to inspect it for bias. Before, during, and after COVID academicians have provided evaluation tools like CRAAP and SIFT to help people separate facts from fiction. *"The CRAAP test can be used to guide users through a series of questions designed to assess a source's credibility.*

9   JAMIESON, K. H., WALDMAN, P.: *The Press Effect: Politicians, Journalists, and the Stories That Shape the Political World*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 73.
10   CROTEAU, D. M., HOYNES, W.: *Media/Society: Industries, Images, and Audiences*. London, New York, Thousand Oaks : Sage Publications, 2016, p. 174
11   JAYES, L. T., et al.: *The Impact of Hyperlinks, Skim Reading and Perceived Importance When Reading on the Web*. [online]. [2023-05-21]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0263669>.
12   BEAN, E.: *Analyzing Information for Bias Is All Around You*. Presented at the 2022 JEA/NSPA, National High School Journalism Convention. St. Louis, presented on 12th November 2022. [online]. [2023-05-21]. Available at: <https://studentpress.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/program.NHSJC.NF22.101922.pdf>.

This test prompts users to consider a source's currency, relevance, authority, accuracy, and purpose before using it to make decisions or draw conclusions."[13]

CRAAP relies on five steps to examine information so prospects can be more confident in sharing or subscribing to it. But in none of the scholarly literature are the details of how to sort information into its respective overarching bias category from the get-go using it discussed.

The SIFT method involves four steps: Stop, Investigate the source, Find trusted coverage, and Trace claims, quotes, and media to their original context. The purpose of the SIFT method is to provide a practical framework for evaluating information and to help users avoid falling for false or misleading information regardless of where the information is located and how it is displayed digitally or in analog format. However, neither of these suggest the very first step in the process, to effectively categorize the information into an overall group of partiality. Thus, this paper serves to propose those categories. Even if individuals simply select information served to them by algorithms, those pieces of information should be tied to the groups suggested here.

4 Discussion

Bias has remained largely undefined in the literature let alone how to identify it. *"Given that, it makes sense librarians have taught students to assess information for bias. In a post-truth society, where disinformation and hyper-partisan media weaponise bias by appealing to emotions rather than facts, there is an added urgency in knowing how to evaluate a source critically."*[14] Users of information, reference librarians, students, teachers in the classroom, those in the civic life, in industry and business, anyone, who may include said information for essays, reports, white papers, in books, blogs, for causal or important decision-making use in social media posts or otherwise, for personal or professional use, before they subscribe to or believe in or recommend such data, should inspect it for bias levels regardless of the topic.

Noting that all information has a purpose and that when seeking information people should strive to be objective and open to varying points of view before formulating a final opinion, they should strive to inspect said information for possible bias it may contain, and they can do so by first separating such data into higher level or most prominent categories of overall partiality regardless of the topic discussed. This initial evaluative step can come before further analysis of fallacies or other evaluative inspection processes and just look at the piece of information for the most prominent category of impartiality it represents.

That said, when one inspects for such information bias, one really is vetting or appraising the material. One can say bias is nothing more than one person's opinion on any given topic, but is that opinion based on good information or bad information and who is to judge? According to *Dictionary.com*, "vetting" means, *"to appraise, verify, or check the accuracy, authenticity, validity"*[15]. Consequently, as the first step in this vetting or evaluative process of any piece of information regardless of its form, digital or analog, such information can be categorized into these seven sources each with their own inherent impartiality, listed and discussed in alphabetic order: 1) Academic, 2) For-Profits, 3) Government, 4) Hidden Agenda, 5) Individuals, 6) Non-Profits, and 7) Watch Dog Groups.

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[13] WINEBURG, S., MCGREW, S., BREAKSTONE, J., ORTEGA, T.: *Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning. Stanford Digital Repository*. Stanford, CA : Stanford University, 2019, p. 6. [online]. [2023-03-06]. Available at: <https://purl.stanford.edu/fv751yt5934>.

[14] BURKHOLDER, J. M., PHILLIPS, K.: Breaking Down Bias: A Practical Framework for the Systematic Evaluation of Source Bias. In *Journal of Information Literacy*, 2022, Vol. 16, No. 2, p. 53.

[15] *Vetting*. [online]. [2023-02-22]. Available at: <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/vetting?s=t>.

4.1 Academic

The first source is Academic. Academic sources are schools, colleges, institutions, and universities. This source is on a mission to create and/or uphold knowledge. If one examines higher education, one finds that in many cases professors and chairs often need to get published particularly through peer reviewed journals so that their research contributes to the literature in a meaningful way. But this race to get published is often tied to tenure and the money they earn as academicians. As the *Ivy League* saying goes, "Publish or perish", meaning that a professor cannot earn tenure if the publication does not occur; therefore, he or she might as well perish. According to *Enago Academy*, *"for graduate students, it means that if the research you're working on isn't 'publishable', you may have a hard time finding a job. For new faculty, 'perish' means not making progress on the track to tenure."*[16]

For potential bias it could mean they might have overlooked some rigor in their study and that the journal that published it could overlook it too. The viability and usability of academic sources has been studied to analyze its use as a source with potential partiality. Inequities in academic publishing have been studied for decades. Such inequities include editorial board selection of the publications, gender, race as well as educational achievements, degrees. For example, Girolamo et al., examined the extent to which various people in the academy were affected by the peer review process including faculty retention, and advancement. *"Experiences of marginalization, including inequity in peer review, may contribute to BIPOC underrepresentation in the academy."*[17]

Sometimes studies about the same topic that may be done at different times or by tracking different variables may have disagreements among findings and conclusions. One study says oatmeal is good for us because it is high in fiber. Another says too much oatmeal can lead to too much carbohydrate intake and weight gain. This is not to say either study is false. When screening information derived from higher education, one should examine the schools the research is tied to and the publications the studies are presented in to make sure these are not predatory. Predatory journals are often categorized as publications that require an inordinate amount of money for a study to be reviewed or ones that instantly publish a study with little or no rigorous peer review. *"Then came predatory publishers, which publish counterfeit journals to exploit the open-access model in which the author pays. These predatory publishers are dishonest and lack transparency."*[18] Therefore, when examining such studies look carefully at the backgrounds of the researchers to determine what, if any, bias exists in their overall effort to lead a conversation in their field. Again, gray areas of bias exist all around us. No study is perfect.

With the advent of several artificial intelligence (AI) tools including the popular *ChatGPT*, one can argue that it falls under the for-profit source since it was created by *OpenAI* which is heavily funded by *Microsoft Corporation*. However, when asked about how it sees itself among the seven sources discussed here, *ChatGPT* said, *"As an AI language model, ChatGPT can be considered an academic source of information. Academic sources are typically created by experts in a particular field, and they are subjected to a rigorous review process by other experts in the same field before being published. Similarly, ChatGPT is developed by a team of experts in natural language processing and machine learning, and its responses are generated based on the patterns it has learned from analyzing large amounts of text data."*[19]

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[16] *Publish or Perish: What Are Its Consequences?* [online]. [2023-02-22]. Available at: <https://www.enago.com/academy/publish-or-perish-consequences/>.

[17] GIROLAMO, T. M.: Inequity in Peer Review in Communication Sciences and Disorders. In *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology,* 2023, Vol. 31, No. 4, p. 1898.

[18] BEALL, J.: Predatory Publishers Are Corrupting Open Access. In *Nature,* 2015, Vol. 521, No. 7551, p. 179.

[19] Author's note: Response to *"How it sees itself among the seven sources discussed here"*. (See: *ChatGPT*. (online forum comment). [online]. [2023-02-23]. Available at: <https://chatgpt.com/>.).

We can perhaps say "academic", but also can surmise "for-profit" which could have some built in conflicts of interests within that machine learning, but we also may label AI generated published content in the "hidden agenda" source since one may never know how such text was generated if the information does not contain an authentic byline. The jury is out whether such AI tools can be simply pigeonholed into the academic category as well as whether their use will be widely accepted in the academy. That said, the academic source nevertheless is its own and brings to all the seven sources of impartiality its own inherent bias.

4.2 For-Profit

Turning to For-Profit organizations, one can postulate that it represents the most amount of all information most people are exposed to off and on the internet because modern culture is primarily fashioned upon a free enterprise market system. According to the *Heritage Foundation's 2021 Index of Economic Freedom*, which measures the degree of economic freedom in countries around the world, there are 161 countries of the 178 recognized by the United Nations that have a mostly free economy, indicating that free enterprise is prevalent.[20] However, one also can postulate that individuals now represent the majority of all information found on and off the internet.

With the rise of social media and personal blogs, it has become easier for individuals to publish and share their thoughts and opinions with a global audience. Additionally, many news outlets and organizations rely on user-generated content, such as eyewitness accounts and videos, to report on events happening around the world. But this is just a general assumption, and the actual distribution of information across the seven sources discussed here may vary depending on the context and topic being discussed. That said, the goal of for-profit organizations is to influence prospects to purchase their product. Therefore, bias is inherent in their sales techniques. *Ford Motor Company* is one example of millions.

Ford is in the business of manufacturing cars. When Ford advertises their products, obviously their goal is to get people interested in buying them. But like all companies, they should be subject to truth in advertising. They can make claims that are independently verified but should not exaggerate such claims just to make a profit. Throughout the years many automobile manufacturers both domestic and international have been caught exaggerating claims from performance, to gas mileage, to air emission ratings.[21] As such, many for-profit companies try to appeal to one's emotions and overvalue their product to make sales. Therefore, double check third party reviewers like Consumer Reports that have been shown to have low bias and impartiality.[22]

An example of a study that examined bias of news coverage among for-profit media corporations themselves was conducted by Gilens and Hertzman who analyzed newspaper coverage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act. *"We find substantial differences in how newspapers reported on these proposed regulatory changes depending on the financial interests of their corporate owners."*[23]

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[20] MILLER, T., KIM, A. B., ROBERTS, J. M.: *2021 Index of Economic Freedom*. [online]. [2023-03-09]. Available at: <https://www.heritage.org/index/pdf/2021/book/2021_IndexOfEconomicFreedom_FINAL.pdf>.

[21] BROWN, N.: *20 Car Ads That Totally Lied to Us.* [online]. [2023-03-05]. Available at: <https://www.hotcars.com/20-car-ads-that-totally-lied-to-us/>.

[22] *Consumer Reports Bias and Credibility*. [online]. [2023-05-21]. Available at: <https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/consumer-reports//>.

[23] See: GILENS, M., HERTZMAN, C.: Corporate Ownership and News Bias: Newspaper Coverage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act. In *The Journal of Politics*, 2000, Vol. 62, No. 2, p. 369-386. [online]. [2023-05-21]. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2647679>.

4.3 Government

Government entities are many. In the United States, for example, there are numerous agencies and departments. From the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to the White House, there are literally dozens upon dozens of governmental units, and each publishes mounds of reports, demographics, advisories, studies, research, and warnings.[24] Bias within these reports might be tied to lobbyists or legislation that is profitable to certain other entities or contain "pork" or "pork-barrel spending". "Pork" is extra initiatives and/or funding that typically has nothing to do with a bill's real purpose. For example, a bill designed to provide homeowners with tax relief in a certain geographic area, may also fund other out of state projects. *"One popular U.S. government text defines pork-barrel legislation as 'Appropriations made by legislative bodies for local projects that are often not needed but that are created so that local representatives can carry their home district in the next election.' But this definition betrays two important biases about pork. First, while appropriations may still be the most important and widely recognized form of pork, it does come in a wider variety of forms than simply direct spending on local projects. Second, while this definition of pork asserts that pork is generally wasteful spending initiated by self-interested incumbents using taxpayer dollars to support their own electoral efforts, just how wasteful one believes pork-barrel legislation is often depends on where one sits."*[25]

Therefore, one must inspect underlying forces that require the bill to be created. The same holds true for many government reports. One should ask how they were funded, and what purpose do they ultimately serve? The statistical data often associated with such reports is vulnerable to manipulation. Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens) said more than 100 years ago, *"Figures don't lie, but liars figure"*. Bohanon and Curott referred to this famous quote in a 2020 *Indiana Business Journal* article regarding misinterpreted U.S. Economy statistics.[26]

Government reports should be rigorous in terms of sample size and proper research method application. So, when assessing these reports pay careful attention to possible bias associated with the politics behind the governmental unit itself. Were these reports influenced by other agencies or people who may have censored some of the information after or prior to its release? Governmental agency reports are sometimes produced to enhance their own hidden agendas. They can generate reports they do not want the public to even know about. Jesse Ventura, a former independent governor of Minnesota, wrote about these reports in his co-authored Simon & Schuster book, *63 Documents the Government Doesn't Want You to Read*.[27] However, in other instances, the government has a right to keep secrets such as nuclear codes, military plans, and those in the best interest of national security.

Therefore, it is important one rigorously reviews such government data. When vetting these kinds of reports, closely examine the legislation that might have originally been created to yield governmental studies and laws. Do these reports reflect more facts rather than opinion? For example, according to a *Washington Post* investigative piece, U.S. officials misled the public about the War in Afghanistan for many years via a variety of government documents the paper obtained.[28]

[24] *The U.S. Government's Official Web Portal.* [online]. [2023-05-21]. Available at: <https://www.usa.gov/>.
[25] BECKER, L.: *Pork-Barrel Expenditures*. [online]. [2023-05-21]. Available at: <https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/fofgac/pork_barrel_expenditures/0>.
[26] BOHANON, C., CUROTT, N.: Tossing Around Statistics Can Quickly Lead to Trouble. In *Indianapolis Business Journal*, 2020, Vol. 41, No. 24, no paging. [online]. [2023-05-21]. Available at: <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A633726700/ITBC?u=uphoenix&sid=ebsco&xid=54ea4032>.
[27] See: VENTURA, J., RUSSELL, D.: *63 Documents That Government Doesn't Want You to Read*. New York, NY : Skyhorse Imprint of Simon & Schuster, 2021.
[28] WHITLOCK, C.: *At War with the Truth*. [online]. [2022-12-09]. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/afghanistan-papers/afghanistan-war-confidential-documents/>.

Another example that examined the credibility of government sources was published in a 2022 edition of Crain's *Chicago Business*. According to the journal, government sources were among the least trusted as well as journalist when compared to scientists and their own coworkers. *"The 22nd annual Trust Barometer survey, which includes more than 36,000 respondents across 28 countries, shows that government institutions were the most trusted source as recently as May 2020. But since then, trust in government has fallen 18 points to 52%."*[29] These examples demonstrate how government information is its own unique type of source with its own unique type of credibility, such trust among the public appears to be waning. When government intertwines with for profits or nonprofits, it also can contain some hidden agendas like pork as discussed.

4.4 Hidden Agenda Groups

Hidden Agenda Groups purport to represent one or several causes, but covertly may represent one or several nefarious undertakings. The information they distribute may be hard to track to a single person or agency. They also may be hard to contact since they really are not in the business of being transparent. Nor do hidden agendas provide accurate information. Groups like *QAnon* who magnify and circulate conspiracy theories are identified as a hidden agenda group. *QAnon* also recruits prominent people in power who might use the information to amplify their messages, to further their own hidden agendas, to enhance their political standing, or to simply bolster their careers.[30] Some of these entities are found in the form of apps, or dangerous computer code masquerading as a friendly game, or a website whose users were drawn there by misleading search engine descriptions.

More recently, *TikTok*, the popular video sharing application, was accused of allegedly collecting and distributing user data for political or other possible nefarious purposes.[31] Applications have less impactful hidden agendas that may include buying or selling user data. For example, *Facebook*, *Google*, and *LinkedIn*, have been accused of violating user privacy policies. In *Facebook*'s case, a company known as *Cambridge Analytics* knowingly used the social media giant's database of users for their own hidden agenda purposes. *"As Facebook reeled, The New York Times delved into the relationship between Cambridge Analytica and John Bolton, the conservative hawk named national security adviser by President Trump. The Times broke the news that in 2014, Cambridge provided Mr. Bolton's 'super PAC' with early versions of its Facebook-derived profiles – the technology's first large-scale use in an American election."*[32]

Quite simply put, you may not ever be able to judge the bias in these groups' materials because their materials are designed to be deceptive like propaganda. They may look like a game or a traditional website that portrays that they represent a good cause but underneath they are funneling data or revenue for another purpose. In sum, we need to be aware that hidden agendas and hidden agenda groups are out there. In a worst-case scenario, if we accidentally paraphrase or quote them, we may be perpetuating their self-interests as our own. From anonymous posts, to protected sources, there is a fine line to how hidden agendas are carried

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29 DAVIS, K.: *Government Officials, Journalists Least-Trusted Sources, Says Survey.* [online]. [2023-05-21]. Available at: <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=shib&db=edsbig&AN=edsbig.A690654628&site=eds-live&scope=site&custid=uphoenix>.
30 KUZNIA, R., DEVINE, C., GRIFFIN, D.: *How QAnon's Lies Are Hijacking the National Conversation.* [online]. [2023-05-21]. Available at: <https://www.cnn.com/2020/12/15/us/qanon-trump-twitter-invs/index.html>.
31 MCMILLAN, R., LIN, L., LI, S.: *Tiktok User Data: What Does the App Collect and Why Are U.S. Authorities Concerned?* [online]. [2023-03-09]. Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/tiktok-user-data-what-does-the-app-collect-and-why-are-u-s-authorities-concerned-11594157084>.
32 CONFESSORE, N.: *Cambridge Analytica and Facebook: The Scandal and Fallout So Far.* [online]. [2023-03-09]. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/04/us/politics/cambridge-analytica-scandal-fallout.html>.

out. It is sufficed to say hidden agendas exist for a multitude of purposes, uses and gratifications, including the spread of fake news and other viral internet messages with no authentication. Some people are more susceptible to these messages that ultimately affect society's overall ability to contribute constructively to civil discourse. As Reader noted, civility means politeness in terms of discourse. Uncivil people sow mistrust and can anger those susceptible to manipulation. Only known processes and facts can be legitimately and openly debated.

Reader examined anonymous comments posted to news media websites for their "civility". Using Condit's theory that contends good public debates are not only represented by those in power or who are otherwise transparent but can include those who choose to be anonymous. *"The framework seems especially suitable for a critical analysis of the issue of anonymous commentary online, as the forums themselves are (ostensibly) intended to be locations for pluralistic debate on all manner of issues – thus, the regulation of those forums might need to be even more accommodating of varied minority viewpoints, including viewpoints that may be considered on the fringes of acceptability."*[33]

Generally, the study highlighted the role of anonymous, otherwise hidden agendas, in shaping perceptions of important debate. This is where it is significant to note how crucial it is that people inspect information for its objectivity, its inclusion of other sources to defend suppositions, for example, and the level of transparency it portrays. Enter critical thinking and efforts made to encourage media literacy skills to help individuals make more informed decisions and resist misinformation and conspiracy theories. Thus, this type of bias, Hidden Agenda, can be disguised as any individual or group of individuals whose covert opinions or behaviors may be the opposite of their overt actions since their posted discourse cannot typically be verified.

4.5 Individuals

Individuals are categorized into their own group simply because they can publish, share, and distribute information that they or others create just like any of the other six sources discussed in this paper. Independence lends itself to personal bias overtly or covertly tied to a hidden agenda. The only way to fairly assess any level of individual bias is to assess ethos, the Greek rhetorical style that involves evaluating the background, credibility, or character of the writer or speaker. To that degree one can examine conflicts of interests that could allow the reader to speculate or judge the piece as bias.

Several studies have identified ethos, as well as its counterparts, pathos (emotion), kairos (timeliness), logos (reasoning, logic) and mythos (symbolic and ritual cultural enactments) embedded in such discourse. In 2022, Iob, Visintin, and Palese examined editorials published by five major nursing journals and found that approximately 25 percent of the persuasiveness was attributed to author ethos, another 25 percent to pathos, and about half dedicated to logos. *"Aristotle links Ethos to the orator, namely, the speaker or author of written texts, to their credibility as a speaker. Using Ethos, authors assert their moral position, promoting full trust and respect from readers (Lo Cascio, 1991)."*[34] However, the authors maintain readers are more open minded to the discourse first than the background of the author.

According to Bizzell and Herzberg as well as many other Aristotle scholars, pathos is an emotional appeal typically related to an argument.[35] Combined with ethos, pathos resonates as the psychological connection between author and reader. For example, Steven Spielberg is

[33] READER, B.: Free Press vs. Free Speech? The Rhetoric of 'Civility' in Regard to Anonymous Online Comments. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2012, Vol. 89, No. 3, p. 499.

[34] See: IOB, G., VISINTINI, C., PALESE, A.: Persuasive Discourses in Editorials Published by the Top-Five Nursing Journals: Findings from a 5-Year Analysis. In *Nursing Philosophy*, 2022, Vol. 23, No. 2, p. 2.

[35] See: BIZZELL, P., HERZBERG, B.: *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present.* Boston, MA, New York, NY : Bedford/St. Martin's, 2021.

Jewish. He had family members in the Holocaust. He directed and produced the award winning 1993 movie *Schindler's List.* Spielberg's ethos and expression of pathos was fundamental to creating a film that resonated with people from many religious sects. His attention to script details enabled him to connect with his audience.

Mythos is like ethos, but instead of being built upon the writer's entire background, it is an ongoing set of assumptions, values, or beliefs about a particular field of study, or specific issue. Richards describes the rhetorical style this way, *"The dominant mythos of a culture is expressed in its arts, literature, values, aspirations and rituals, providing individuals with the resources for interpreting and expressing their emotional lives and relationships with others."*[36]

Finally, kairos is defined as *"the opportune moment of speech, which involves not only the fitting occasion but also the fitting style and the fitting composition."*[37] Most experienced social media users have seen posts whose friends or connections have shared what they thought was timely information only upon closer inspection to discover just how outdated the material was in support of an argument. This is not to say outdated information is not valid, it is to say there could be newer more rigorous data available.

All published information can be said to contain any degree of these Greek rhetorical styles. We could arrange these styles in an easy to remember acronym such as KLEMP: kairos, logos, ethos, mythos, and logos. By examining the credibility of the author and possible conflicts of interest, the published piece may be said to contain some bias.[38] By the very virtue of individual's abilities to contribute to public discourse they too represent an overall partiality that upon inspection holds them accountable to their ethos, their credibility, objectivity, values, transparency, and authenticity. As such individuals' perspectives and biases present can range from hidden agendas to conflicts of interest, but that one's ethos can enhance a piece of information by including that author's experience or expertise.

4.6 Non-Profit

Non-Profits are either public charities, philanthropic foundations, or an enterprise that serves individuals, industry, or education. Examples include churches, shrines, and synagogues as well as governments, some business associations, municipalities, and other community enterprises. The *Young Men's Christian Association* (YMCA), *American Foundation for Suicide Prevention*, the *American Marketing Association*, and the *United Negro College Fund*, have been reliable examples of popular non-profits. It is important to vet all publicized information pertaining to non-profits by carefully examining any claims they make about where funds are distributed and if their actions align with the values they publicize, yet like any of the other six sources of over partiality, they too can emulate bias tied to any subject or cause they may represent.

Little is known as to the level of nonprofit bias in communications, but a recent study examined how one Kenya based nonprofit strived to remove bias from its own messaging. *NEW STORIES Room to Read*, is an international nonprofit that teaches children to read.

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[36] RICHARDS, G.: Mythos and Logos. In RIEBER, R. W. (ed.): *Psychology, Religion, and the Nature of the Soul*. New York, NY : Springer, 2011, p. 9.

[37] KINNEAVY, J. L., ESKIN, C. R.: Kairos in Aristotle's "Rhetoric". In *Written Communication*, 2000, Vol. 17, No. 3, p. 432.

[38] BEAN, E.: *Weeding Out Suspect Bias Using the Greek Rhetorical Styles of KLEMP in Social Media and News Stories.* Presented at the 2022 National Council of Teachers of English Homecoming Conference. Louisville, KY, presented on 31st July, 2022. [online]. [2023-05-21]. Available at: <https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/fd10a2bf-629c-4c87-b041-43eb2af8f6a0/downloads/NCTE_2022ELATEHomecoming_Program.pdf?ver=1684858591632>.

"Geographically imprecise terms force people to make assumptions, and they often reflect and perpetuate bias by defining complex communities with singular perspectives."[39]
As a distinct type of source nonprofits can imbued impartiality for their own benefit and causes regardless of what they represent and therefore, are unique among the other six sources identified.

4.7 Watchdog Groups

The purpose of watchdog groups is to monitor other groups by employing checks and balances approach. They measure the value these groups hold for humanity. For example, *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals* (PETA) helps spread awareness about animal safety and wellbeing and others like the *Gun Violence Archive* (GVA) track incidents of gun violence across America. Others track water resources such as the *Environmental Working Group*.[40] Watchdog groups may contain any number of biases or hidden agendas as well that could possibly lead people to follow a false cause if they are not authentic or transparent in their published communications. Most watchdog groups are organized as non-profits and provide a philanthropic approach to their public value. Like any nonprofit one should scrutinize watchdogs to be sure they are legitimate. *"A nonprofit watchdog – also called a charity watchdog (CWD) or nonprofit evaluator – refers to a type of nonprofit organization that exists to gather and provide information, reviews, and ratings of other nonprofit organizations. These organizations are not associated with the government, as each is an independent, nonprofit group of its own."*[41]
Watchdogs, while organized as nonprofits, can have biases that tie them to their own unique impartiality. But watchdogs, nevertheless, are grouped differently from the other six discussed, a source that as suggested earlier in this paper, should be first analyzed as such when inspecting any piece of information that one finds or appears in their newsfeed or in social media. The inspection can be something as simple as identifying the author and their affiliation, the medium in which the piece of information is published, and its intended original audience.

5 Conclusion

The seven sources of overall impartiality discussed in this paper have their unique biases that are typically tied to their mission and purpose. Yes, it is possible that when evaluating any piece of information, it might be found that it can be tied to more than one of these sources as well as other types of biases baked into it which makes critically thinking about information such an important step in subscribing to or sharing such information. The stakes are high for not properly vetting information and while the merits of traditional types of bias such as personal explicit and implicit prejudice, and other types of biases more related to information such as confirmation, affinity, halo, and anchoring bias, are important types, these seven types of sources represent their overall bias impartiality that hold them accountable to authentic and objective information when they publish any piece of information.

[39] MURALI, G., HEGRANES, C.: Charity's Guide Helps Nonprofits Use More Equitable Language. In *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, 2022, Vol. 34, No. 7, no paging. [online]. [2023-05-21]. Available at: <https://www.philanthropy.com/article/using-dignified-language-unseats-bias-and-advances-equity>.

[40] BOTE, J.: *Toxic 'Forever Chemicals' Found in Drinking Water Throughout US*. [online]. [2023-05-21]. https://www.philanthropy.com/article/using-dignified-language-unseats-bias-and-advances-equity Available at: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2020/01/23/pfas-toxic-forever-chemicals-found-drinking-water-throughout-us/4540909002/>.

[41] *What Executive Directors Need to Know About Nonprofit Watchdogs*. [online]. [2023-05-21]. Available at: <https://www.growthforce.com/blog/nonprofit-watchdogs>.

More importantly the seven sources of bias discussed here within represent all the possible high level first types of sources for which all other biases types like fallacies, for example, might be later found upon further inspection. This alone is an important factor that all who may employ CRAAP or SIFT as an evaluation tool should be aware. The seven initial prominent sources of all information bias impartiality types rest on parsing them in the initial evaluative process, a first step in critically thinking about information, who created it and its ultimate purpose. No one can control how people initially interact with information. Whether they succumb to information served to them by an algorithm or they search for information, parsing it into one or more of these seven sources is a step in the right bias analysis recognition direction.

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