

Truth & consequences

Websites fact check candidates

Maybe we should change the old saying, "Truth is the first casualty of war," to "Truth is the first casualty of presidential campaigns."

Politicians have told people what they want to hear — true or not — for as long as there have been elections. This campaign season is no exception. The big difference in the last several presidential elections, however, has not been the veracity of the candidates but rather the platforms they use to deliver their manure.

Before electronic media emerged, candidates delivered speeches to live audiences, and newspapers reported their remarks. Radio, then

television, gave politicians the means to reach much larger audiences in real time, but a limited number of channels and broadcast hours constrained them.

Now, there are 24-hour news channels on television plus websites and blogs that run around the clock. Many of these electronic venues cater to specific audiences with shared beliefs that don't necessarily conform to facts. Anyone with an ax to grind and a computer or cell phone can contribute content to this never-ending stream of "news." Campaigns can just preach to the choir, reinforcing false beliefs in order to shore up their base.

Technology provides the tools not only to help create the partisan cesspool that is the modern media, but also to help you wade through the effluent.

Problem and solution

Two websites I've written about before are worth revisiting in a presidential election year.

FactCheck.org and **Politifact.com** are devoted to evaluating political candidates' statements and positions for accuracy and consistency.

The Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania runs FactCheck. The Tampa Bay Times, owned by the Poynter Institute, runs Politifact, which won a Pulitzer Prize. Both sites are based in journalism and academia. They claim to be objective, and they appear to be.

Current political stories, such as the recent debates, are featured prominently on the home pages of the sites. The sites let you check on the truthfulness of specific politicians. You also can check on the 2016 campaign in general. There also are archives and search functions to research other topics.

Politifact is known for its Truth-o-meter, which rates statements on a scale from "true" to "pants on fire." FactCheck doesn't rate the accuracy of statements as dramatically but it does discuss the degree of dishonesty in its explanations.

These sites are valuable resources for evaluating candidates. Visiting them is enlightening and depressing. Some pols are more egregious with their lying, but they all do it.

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InSites

