We want media systems that support democratic culture & healthy, happy people.

We build communities & tools to reform and transform media systems.
Narrative Observatory

Reach and resonate with the right people in today’s media minefield
In the last year, we’ve listened to and worked with cultural and narrative strategists, content creators and funders to tune our emerging infrastructure and offerings.

**FUNDING**

“We need the ability to zoom out and really look at the whole media landscape, rather than just the part we’re most familiar with . . . or happen to have data or tools to view.”

**ADVOCACY**

“We found out through trial and error that the audience we were working with hated outside influencers, so nothing we were saying mattered.”

**CONTENT CREATION**

“All of our audience research is anecdotal. We’re a small team, so deep dives on narratives would just take too much time and person power.”
Our data infrastructure centers people and the content they care about, wherever they consume or create it . . . in both the data we analyze and how we analyze it.
POTENTIAL IMPACT
AS CULTURAL SPACE
1 SEGMENT THE SPACE
BY AUDIENCE x VALUES
Audiences @ Narrative Observatory

The people we want to reach don’t spend their time thinking about us and our issue. So what stories do they live inside? What voices do they value? How can we speak to them in ways that resonate?

To find out, we analyzed hundreds of thousands of media artifacts consumed by 50,000+ Americans to create a “day in the media life” for each of 4 values-distinct U.S. audiences. Explore their feeds to see the poverty narratives they’re encountering inside their culture.
MAP THE NARRATIVE TERRAIN
BY AUDIENCE x ISSUE
CLIMATE SKEPTIC NARRATIVES  
(2017)

TROJAN HORSE

- The Cult, the Church, the Religion
- Paganism, Animism, Nature Worship
- The Green Dragon
- Regulators, Control Freaks, Hyprocites
- De-Population
- Watermelon
- Elites, the Jews, Key Public Figures

It's a trojan horse for other agendas.

NATURAL

- Solar Activity and Other Factors
- Polar Bears, Snow and Other Signs
- Pollutant CO2?
- Ideological Science, Alarmist Policy
- Faulty Models, in the Matrix
- The Underdog, the Whistleblower

Human activity is not the cause, and the impacts will be negligible.

OPPORTUNITY

- Global Greening
- Florida Everywhere
- More Energy, More Invention, More Prosperity: Progress
- The Cold Dark World of Drudgery
- The Poor and the Vulnerable
- Dominion

It's an opportunity for more growth.

NARRATIVE OCCURRENCE ON FOX NEWS — NOV '16 - MAR '17

TROJAN HORSE

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NATURAL

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OPPORTUNITY

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3 TEST CONTENT HYPOTHESES AGAINST IMPACT GOALS
The human race will accomplish such great things...if we have time.

We can create a future where there's plenty for everyone.

Fighting over resources we've wasted or destroyed means no future at all.

We can end our world. Or free ourselves to live our dreams.

Each generation is supposed to teach the next. Don't let that end.

People make dumb mistakes and cause accidents all the time.

Together, we can make sure we don't blow up our future by accident.

NUCLEAR THREAT
(2021)
While they may not have moved participants towards the healthier narrative, all of the videos made participants feel that AI was more likely to make our world a worse place.

This effect was significant when compared to the control, for In the Event of Moon Disaster and Deep Reckonings, which both use techniques, such as deepfakes and video editing, to make people appear to say things they’ve never said.

In addition, all of the videos promoted narratives that produced fear and/or imagined an unhappy ending for humanity, with increased insecurity about whether humans could maintain control over AI. Specifically, participants gravitated towards the Robot Overlords narrative and away from the Augmented Intelligence narrative.

This effect was significant for Deep Reckonings, which uses AI techniques to make it appear as though Brett Kavanaugh is delivering an apology speech.
Thanks for listening
Generating insights from cultural material using quantitative and qualitative methods requires a diversity of experience, and very specific, very in-demand data skills. How does a small non-profit build a technical talent pipeline that ensures a diversity of experience and prioritizes inclusion?

Operating big data infrastructure is super expensive, and the market for issue-based cultural or narrative strategy is relatively small. How do we build a business model that can make the Narrative Observatory available to organizations that need it (and do not have big budgets) while fully covering the costs of remaining “best-in-class” and continuing to innovate to serve the field’s needs?

The community of practice for narrative and cultural strategy is emergent. There is a lot of opportunity and some risk that interest wanes, if methods and practices do not evolve and yield sustained successes. Can the Narrative Observatory move beyond one-off project work for our partners to become a hub for the larger community of practitioners? How?

Data philanthropy can yield tenuous relationships, where champions for our work come and go, and it’s never perceived as core to business. How can we expand and/or evolve our data philanthropy relationships and deepen partner engagement with our work?

Everyone thinks this stuff is amazing and cool, and the audience stuff definitely helps creators make more resonant stuff, but what are good ways to explore and communicate how to shape stories without scripting storytellers?

Doing this work requires engineers, data scientists, and professional services. It’s expensive and hard. How do we engage storytellers and advocates as the drivers of this work, without asking them to be experts in engineering, research, or statistics?