Twitter Thread by Venkatesh Rao



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Heh, one thing the nyt piece managed was to do a Cunningham's law nerdsnipe-wmd at newspaper scale... now a bunch of people are energetically trying to post the right answer.

> One other thing I should really clarify and that the @nytimes piece got *severely* wrong: while I believe there are very strong sociological and even causal links between rationalism and NRx (especially in the Silicon Valley homes bases) their ideological and methodological
>
> — (((E. Glen Weyl))) (@glenweyl) February 14, 2021

IMO trying to correct whatever the NYT writer thought he knew/understood is futile. "Willing to be misunderstood by the NYT" should be the default stance unless you want to waste a lot of time correcting an obsolete 2013 map for people who don't care.

The thing is, the NYT still has enough normative cultural power, even as it has fallen from newspaper-of-record, that it takes a particular sort of heretical self-confidence to sort of ignore whatever they happen to be wrong about on any given week, whether or not it concerns you

A subtle shift has occurred in the workings of the Gell-Mann amnesia effect. It used to be an individual private amnesia re: media ("I'll believe myself when I am certain they got it wrong because I'm an expert, but still believe them when I am not"). Now it's a collective effect

A sort of common-knowledge threshold has been crossed lately. "Everybody knows that everybody knows the NYT is wrong on X across largish subcultures." It's no longer mutual beliefs being validated occasionally 1:1.

SV isn't the first to achieve this sort of collective bozobitting of the NYT... I think econtwitter got there first. Krugman is ok for the school of thought he represents, but "the economy according to the NYT" bears little resemblance to "the economy according to economists"

It's very patchy though. The internal culture war they have going on between the old guard and the entryist upstarts who've made inroads has left some coverage areas/beats untouched, torched other areas entirely, and left other areas in some sort of partisan-controlled state

It would be interesting to see a map of say several dozen major areas/beats, with a map of current control state.

A couple of years ago, a journalist (with a different bias) got in touch with me in pursuit of this kind of feature for another major newspaper. I gave him a couple of hours time and also directed him to a representative sampling of friends across the map. That piece got axed.

He was a sincere, thoughtful guy, and though I didn't quite like the tack he was planning to take, I thought he approached the matter with enough good faith to help out. What I did't anticipate was how hard it would be to simply convey the rawest of basics.

Ie, dramatis personae, major events and schisms, my own take on people/threads (being careful to separate information from opinion). But despite my effort, when he tried to recap for me to confirm he'd understood, I realized he hadn't. A lot of subtle distortions had crept it.

There was no malice... just the deep difficulty of trying to convey an inside view of a cultural narrative to an outside view informed by a pre-existing motivated perspective (which isn't a bad thing -- it's inevitable... the key is to be aware of it try to account for it)

That experience convinced me to adopt the "willing to be misunderstood" stance. Explaining yourself is far harder than merely setting up basic defenses against hostile/malicious misunderstandings.

CNN shares a basic positioning with the NYT, but has so far remained relatively free of the dynamics that have taken over the latter. I think because a) they are TV-centric and b) less insular via a revolving door relationship with a broader sample of establishment center-left.

The TV-centric newsroom of CNN meant they avoided subscription-paywell perverse incentive, and also avoided opening a door to the new-media grifter class in an attempt to be clickbait-relevant. Their's is a more familiar sort of old-school cronyist set of biases we can roll with

The only real comparable to NYT is Fox. What talk-radio did to Fox, gawkerized new media did to the NYT. In each case, the dark nexus made an ostensibly broad-based media org captive to a tiny cabal that had mastered One Weird Trick critical to staying solvent in the digital age.

I don't follow this subplot as closely as I should, but a lot of my conclusions are derived/stolen from, @Aelkus and @Brett_Fujioka who track the play by play of this stuff a lot more, and also with a broader global perspective, since this has already played out in Asia

Check out Brett's Noema article on related matters to see how deep the rabbit hole actually goes https://t.co/an83KaxkbP

Point of that article is... if you *actually* do the due diligence and heavy lift work trying to understand the sort of cultural landscape we're talking about, you end up with much deeper, and more complex takes that are... I dunno... actually interesting even to insiders?

There's a sort of gold standard in cultural reporting that most media outlets don't even aspire to anymore: cover a thing so powerfully well that the insiders you're talking about ignore any critical element and achieve a new self-awareness of themselves.

The current operating standard is: cover it in a way that flatters the self-congratulatory conceits of the cabal in control of the newsroom, and the hardened beliefs of the most cult-loyal readers who will punish you for challenging their preconceptions even slightly.