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FAKE NEWS: A CASE STUDY

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BY

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Ch.1: What Is Fake News?

We are living in an age where technology is rapidly evolving and improving. Our ability to correctly contain and monitor its effects are strained due to humanity's restraint towards pushing forward into the future. This can cause unforeseen consequences. One of these consequences is the impact that technology and media messages have on its audiences. Accuracy in the media has been a major concern of many in the face of the rise of misinformation. Many media productions and even news can negatively influence their audiences into believing harmful ideals and themes all thanks to misinformation tactics. One of the biggest problems affecting the media landscape today would be fake news.

Fake news, as defined by Collins Dictionary, "false, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news reporting" (www.collinsdictionary.com). Fake news is dangerous because it feeds wrong information to viewers. This false information can cause drastic repercussions if left in the handles of unstable individuals. This can cause serious socio-cultural problems that can drastically shape cultures and societies. Fake news can take various shapes like websites, videos, magazines, and social media accounts. It's this adaptability and ease of creation that makes it such a threat. Anyone can create fake, which is a major issue.

This adaptability has created distinguishing problems for researchers and viewers alike. That's they many researchers and companies have created several ways to identify fake news. The website Telegraph has broken up fake news into 5 types to help distinguish them. The first type of fake news are news stories that are "Intentionally deceptive" (www.telegraph.co.uk). These news stories are written to entirely deceive its readers and viewers. This is purposeful

lying about information. The second type of fake news are new stories that have “jokes taken at face value” (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk>). These websites and companies are intentionally satirical and they poke fun at the media. They are humors stories meant to create humor and to satirize the current media landscape. The third type of fake news are “large-scale hoaxes” (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk>). These are stories that are false that are then shared and reported by legitimate news sources. It’s the sharing of false information, whether purposeful or accidental, by verified and successful media networks. The fourth type of fake news would be ‘slanted reporting of real facts’ (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk>). This would be when elements of a story are selectively chosen and picked out to fit a partisan and company narrative. It’s editing the story to fit a narrative supported by the company writing it. The fifth and final type of fake news would be with “stories where the truth is contentious” (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk>). This is when reporters and writers would change the story to find their worldview due to lack of information on the topic.

Fake news is a big problem in society. It confuses the policies and information that people believe in and receive and turn them round. It’s this style of misinformation that can play havoc with any civilized society. Despite this rise in fake news over the course of the last few years, it can be beaten. The best way to combat these issues is to have a stronger media literacy curriculum in classes, stronger critical thinking, fact checking programs, and corporate help. These can combat propaganda and fake news and wrongful messages that come with them. This is one of the best ways to counter inaccuracy and fake news in the media. The purpose of this case study is to create an overview of fake news, its history, methodology, and ways to combat it. It’s about bringing awareness to an issue that causes serious global and political problems.

Ch. 2: History Of Fake News

Fake news currently is a major trend and issue in the media landscape currently. As we know, fake news is a deliberate attempt of spreading misinformation through both traditional and digital means. Fake news has especially been an issue with the current digital era. However, Fake news has actually been around for thousands of years as a tool for political maneuvering and reputation smearing. There are records of fake news being utilized during the Roman Empire. Despite the recent resurgence and fear of fake news, it's been around of centuries in various forms and motivations. Fake news has been around for thousands of years as a tool for political maneuvering and reputation smearing. There are records of fake news being utilized during the Roman Empire. One example of this would be that "Octavian's strong but fabricated narrative helped him defeat Mark Antony" (Kiminska). Next instance of fake news was recorded was during the Byzantine Empire's height of power. The Empire's greatest ruler was Justinian I and his reign. However, a historian by the name of Procopius wrote a manuscript filled with misinformation about Justinian during the 6th century. This manuscript was named the *Anecdota*. He "kept this secret until his death, in order to smear the reputation of the Emperor Justinian after lionizing the emperor in his official histories" (Darnton).

Next record of major use of fake news would be after the creation of the printing press. The printing press was "invented in the mid-15th century (during the Renaissance period) by a German goldsmith named Johannes Gutenberg" (<http://www.skwirk.com>). The printing press is widely considered by many to be one of the most important inventions of all time. It allowed for a larger distribution of the written word and knowledge. The printing press "enabled the fast flow of information and lead to the spread of new ideas" (<http://www.skwirk.com>). This would drastically affect the impact the rise of art during the renaissance, communications between

countries and people, books, universities, and thought. This also help break down the language barriers between cultures and books. This is because the bible and other works were mostly hand-written by monks and priests living in monasteries and religious centers. These were also mostly written in either Latin, Hebrew, or Arabic. With the ability to mass produce written material, more countries and cultures would be able to read the bible and other works within their own languages. This also impacted the levels of literacy in Europe. As we know, literacy is important to a society. It allows for better critical thought, analysis, and progress. It's because of this rise in literacy that "lead to the Scientific Revolution of the Enlightenment, which would radically alter how Europeans viewed the world and universe" (Butler). However, this rise of literacy and the written word also became a target for manipulation. News sources were still limited in variety so many took advantage of that. Stories and sources were harder to verify in that age thanks to more difficult methods of transportation and distribution. Messages would take days to even months to even reach their targeted destination. Therefore it was harder to stay informed about the world at large at that time.

There was also no concept of journalist ethics of regulations. Individuals could write and send any information they wanted without cause for alarm or worry. The Catholic Church and other religious institutions used this as a way to instill propaganda to the masses. Since information wasn't as available back then as it was now, people didn't know any better and so they believed it. One of the most famous fake news stories in history was that of the Lisbon Earthquake of 1775. According to detailed reports, records and evidence, "an entire genre of fake news pamphlets (*relações de sucessos*) emerged in Portugal, claiming that some survivors owed their lives to an apparition of the Virgin Mary. These religiously inspired accounts of the earthquake sparked the famed Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire to attack religious

explanations of natural events, and also made Voltaire into an activist against fake religious news” (Soll).

Unfortunately this push for more honest and ethical news and information faced a serious obstacle in the 20th century: propaganda. Business Dictionary quotes propaganda as “a message designed to persuade its intended audience to think and behave in a certain manner” (www.businessdictionary.com). Propaganda is most commonly used by authoritarian and fascist regimes to keep the populace compliant, ignorant, and loyal. It also utilizes fake news. Both use misinformation and manipulation to tell a narrative to cause either chaos or control. They also rely on individuals to not do their own research and to speak out. They rely on a compliant and loyal audience base to survive and to promote agenda. Both work propaganda and fake news have worked interchangeably in several situations in history.

One of the best examples of the use of propaganda and fake news would be Adolf Hitler. Hitler extensively utilized propaganda messages to keep the public’s attention away from the government’s action and to keep them loyal by creating scapegoats. In order to achieve their propaganda they began targeting anything that disagreed with the Nazi Party’s values and beliefs. These would include book burning, and controlling the film, print, and broadcasting companies in Germany. Their usage of film as a propaganda tool was a major component to their successful plan of brainwashing the public. There are two great examples of the Nazi regime utilizing propaganda in film. The first example was “*The Eternal Jew* (1940), directed by Fritz Hippler, portrayed Jews as wandering cultural parasites, consumed by sex and money. *The Triumph of the Will* (1935) by Leni Riefenstahl, glorified Hitler and the National Socialist movement” (www.ushmm.org). This helped shape the minds of its audiences to believe fully in the beliefs and ideals of the Third Reich.



Figure 1: "Youth Serves the Leader: All 10-Year-Olds in the Hitler Youth"
Hitler Youth Propaganda poster
Taken from: www.newthinktank.com



Figure 2: "Children, what do you know of the Führer?"
Hitler Youth propaganda poster.
Taken from: www.historyjk.blogspot.co.uk

Their use of radios was also important.

The Nazi Party cut the cost of radios so that everyone could have them. This way, everyone would be able to own one and listen to Hitler's speeches and public messages. The more people hear him, the more they inclined to believe in the message. Evidence supports this thought because "Loud speakers were put up in streets so that people could not avoid any speeches by the Führer. Cafes and other such properties were ordered to play in public speeches by Hitler" (Trueman).

Nazi Germany wasn't the only country conducting propaganda. Almost every major country during that time period participated on propaganda and control. The United States in particular used propaganda pieces to enlist workers, inspire citizens to become soldiers, and to demonize their enemies which would be Italy, Germany, and Japan during WWII. Even Disney

was caught up in the propaganda machine to help create pieces, videos, and media to invigorate the war effort and sell war bonds. One of their most famous propaganda pieces would be Der Fuehrer's Face. This short featured "Donald Duck at work in a factory operated by the Nazis in Germany." (Nieuwint). This was very popular with the public and remains a staple of the power of propaganda.



Figure 3: A screenshot from the Disney propaganda film *Der Fuehrer's Face*.
Taken from: www.warhistoryonline.com

The next example of propaganda and fake news would be the Red Scare. The Red Scare took place in America during the late 1950s. The United States of America saw Soviet Russia and Communism as a threat to global stability, capitalism, and to the country. In order to stay ahead of the Soviets, many within the government started probing and vetting American citizens to make sure that they weren't either Communists, Soviet sympathizers, or spies. They probed and researched citizens from all walks of life and professions. This helped cause a climate of fear, oppression, and witch hunting. Senator Joseph McCarthy was the biggest witch hunter during the Red Scare who managed to become a terrifying presence on the domestic stage as his

investigations would strike fear in the hearts of American citizens. This period is also referred to as “McCarthyism” (Achter). Over 35 days in 1954, McCarthy and his hearings terrified the public due to the massive coverage of them and his accusations of people. His accusations would tend to ruin the lives of many. Many of those accusations proved to be untrue as well. McCarthy used his accusations and the public’s fear of Communism to assert his dominance over the country. He pushed out fake information to several rivals in order to advance in position and to pursue his agenda. He would utilize radio broadcasts, printed media, and television to promote fearmongering and false accusations. Thankfully his reign of terror ended after expert journalism and reporting thanks to journalist Edward R. Murrow. Murrow utilized his show, See It Now, to publish an editorial about Senator McCarthy. This editorial targeted McCarthy’s false accusations, the innocents has affected, and his lack of character. “McCarthy, exposed as a reckless bully, was officially condemned by the U.S. Senate for contempt against his colleagues in December 1954.” (<http://www.peoplesworld.org>). McCarthy would die in 1957 and thanks to public awareness of his actions, McCarthyism would decline shortly afterwards.

The final period of history on fake news that this paper will be discussing will be during the 2016 US Presidential Election. This is an important period to study not because it was recent, but because it highlighted the influence of fake news and his adaptable nature. This election pitted the Democratic Candidate Hillary Clinton and the Republican Candidate Donald Trump. The election was incredibly polarized by both sides of the political spectrum which only made tensions between the candidates even worse. Many of these tensions would be caused by outbreaks of fake news stories on the candidates. However, the Trump Campaign and presidential administration has a noted history of being involved and surrounded by fake news stories and utilizations. The Trump campaign is an interesting case study on the manner of fake

news because of this. Trump would often hurl fake accusations and stories on political opponents in order to delegitimize them in the eyes of republican voters. One example of this would be Trump's usage of a fake conspiracy theory against Senator Ted Cruz. Trump claimed that Ted Cruz's father, Rafael Cruz, was involved with the JFK assassination based on pictures of Rafael and Lee Harvey Oswald hanging out together. His statement on the accusation was "All I did is point out the fact that on the cover of the National Enquirer there was a picture of him and crazy Lee Harvey Oswald having breakfast" (Spinelli). The source that he got this information from was the National Enquirer. The National Enquirer is a fake news magazine famous for pushing conspiracy theories and celebrity drama and affairs. The National Enquirer is also a favorite news source of Donald Trump because of his friendship with the Enquirer's CEO David Pecker. He would go on to defend his friend and his statement by talking about the company's negative reputation. Trump claims that they are a reputable news source. He further went on to defend the Enquirer's fake news story on Cruz by making a comparison to the New York Times. He said that if the story came from "The New York Times, they would have gotten Pulitzer Prizes for their reporting" (Spinelli).

The fake news organizations that plagued the election would utilize both digital and traditional media platforms to push their false stories and accusations. This was a revolutionary way to spread misinformation thanks to the ease of use and networking optional of the internet. Many of these fake news stories and events would be circulated through digital media channels like websites and social media pages. Social media is a game changer for fake news because of its huge user-base, and how easy it is to post fake information and acquire profit from it. Sites like Facebook and Twitter were plagued with fake news stories all over the course of the presidential election. One important example of Donald Trump's usage of fake news through

social media was the Birtherism movement. Birtherism is “a movement in the United States that doubts or denies that President Barack Obama is a natural-born U.S. citizen, thus implying that he is ineligible to be President” (www.yourdictionary.com). This movement was rumored to be created by Hillary’s campaign team in 2008. Donald Trump began falsely claiming Hillary Clinton was the true progenitor of the birther conspiracy theory” (Cheney and Gass). However, this was proven to be false as the real creator of the theory “reportedly began with innuendo by serial Illinois political candidate Andy Martin, who painted Obama as a closet Muslim in 2004” (Cheney and Gass). He would eventually disavow his connection to the theory, despite that it became a minor movement later on. Three years later during the 2012 Presidential Election, Donald Trump began publicly inquiring about Obama’s birthplace and true nationality. He started off talking about the issue in interviews and on social media. His push for it became even bigger when he publicly announced that he was sending private investigators to find evidence that Obama wasn’t born in Hawaii but in Kenya. He quoted as saying “I have people that actually have been studying it and they cannot believe what they're finding" (Megerian). This ended up proving to be false as he never clarified on the supposed findings. He then proceeded to falsely explain on an interview with Good Morning America that Obama was in fact trying to hide his birth certificate which is why he hasn’t released it nor why Trump hasn’t found anything. Trump’s explanation for his false accusation of Obama was that “maybe it says he’s a Muslim” (Megerian). This also was proven to be a major lie because Obama has publicly announced that he is Christian several times. Regardless of the fact that Trump was pushing lies for publicity, the story and his accusations were picked up by several news organizations and sites. It was an incredibly hot topic of discussion, in no part thanks to the preparation for the 2012 election. However Obama eventually released the birth certificate and it state that he was

born in Hawaii. Trump, in response to the reveal, “held a press conference where he took credit for the development” (Abramson). This eventually culminated with President Obama openly mocking Trump at the White House correspondent’s dinner. Obama openly citizen Trump for his deliberate attempts to twist the media, attack him, and to gain attention. “I know that he's taken some flak lately, but no one is happier, no one is prouder to put this birth certificate issue to rest,

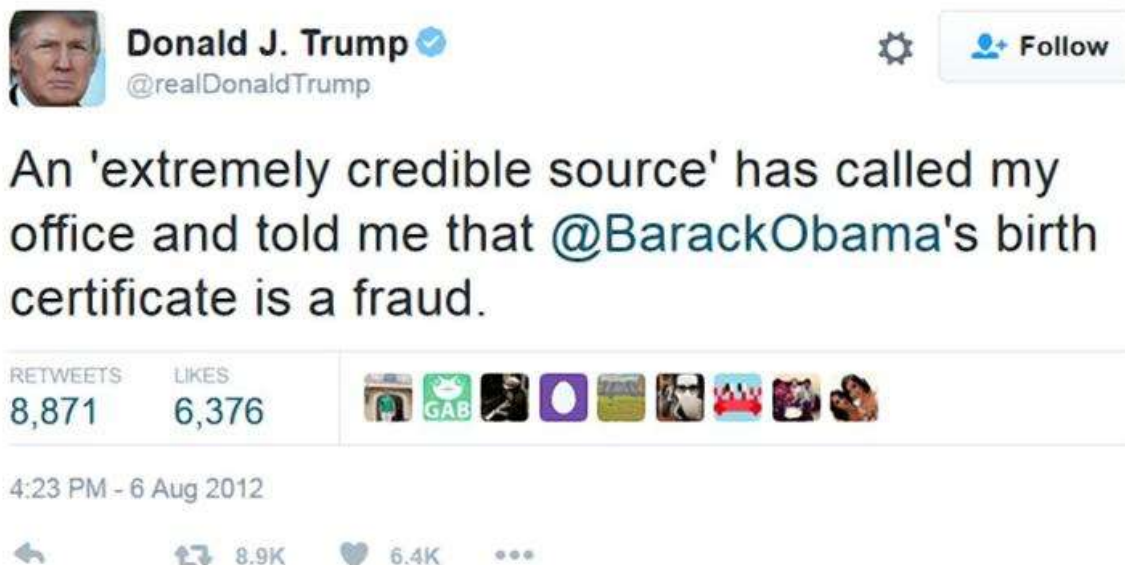


Figure 4: Trump’s tweet lying about Obama not being a natural born American citizen.
Taken from: <http://www.nydailynews.com>

and that's
because he

can finally get back to focusing on the issues that matter, like did we fake the moon landing?

What really happened in Roswell? And where are Biggie and Tupac?" (Keneally). Many thought that this would bury the birther movement and put a stop to the numerous fake news articles and pieces about it. Unfortunately that would not be the case. Unfortunately this was not the last instance of Trump’s obsession with the false theory.

Two months before the election, Donald Trump sent out a tweet claiming that he had a credible source about Obama’s birth certificate and that he was a fraud. The tweet became widely circulated with the press, with many calling him crazy, and attention starved. Hillary

Clinton called Donald Trump a racist for this action by saying “He has really started his political activity based on this racist lie that our first black president was not an American citizen” (Durkin). This and another accusation from him in 2013 proved to be false. Donald Trump’s stance on the birther movement eventually came to a close during the 2016 Presidential election. After initial dodging from the press about his role in the peddling of the fake information and stories, his campaign manager Kellyanne Conway said that “Trump believes Obama was born in the U.S.” (Megerian).

The another example of Fake news during the 2016 Presidential Election was a study conducted by BuzzFeed in response to the rise of fake news on social media and websites. BuzzFeed News identified over 100 fake news sites in Macedonia. These stories were written by teens and one website

“averaging over 1 million views a month”

(Silverman and Alexander). These

stories were not only incredibly successful in reaching a large

audience, but they were also very profitable for the writers themselves. Not only that but it also showed that many of these websites and social media accounts were targeting conservative and Trump audiences. “These sites have American-sounding domain names such as WorldPoliticus.com, TrumpVision365.com, USConservativeToday.com, DonaldTrumpNews.co, and USADailyPolitics.com.” (Silverman and Alexander). This is also highlighted by the fact

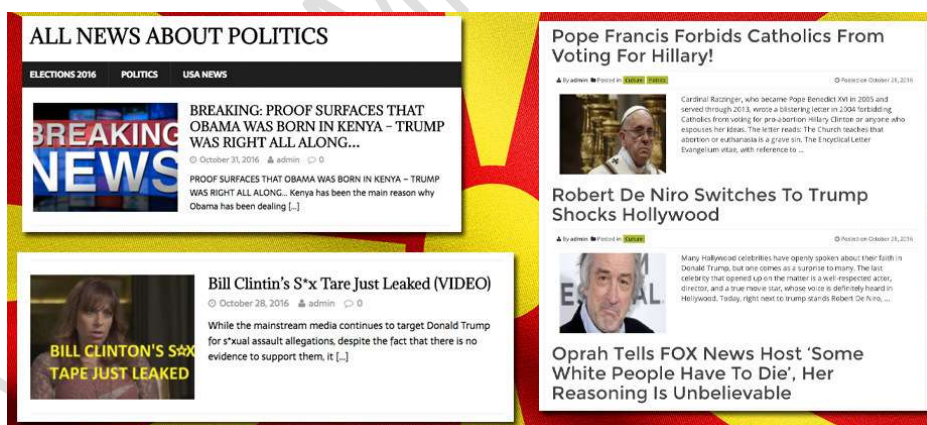


Figure: 5: Fake news stories from US political based website that was run by Macedonians.

Taken from” www.buzzfeed.com

that this investigation that many of the crazier fake news stories were trending better on Facebook than real stories and headlines. For one example would be from one of the fake news website called ConservativeState.com. Their headline for a story was “Hillary Clinton In 2013: ‘I Would Like To See People Like Donald Trump Run For Office; They’re Honest And Can’t Be Bought’ The post was a week old and had racked up an astounding 480,000 shares, reactions, and comments on Facebook.” (Silverman and Alexander). This ended up being the most popular story on that website. Now we have to compare that to another story from the *New York Times* that same week. Their story revealed that Trump “declared a \$916 million loss on his 1995 income tax returns, a tax deduction so substantial it could have allowed him to legally avoid paying any federal income taxes for up to 18 years” (Barstow, Craig, Buetner and Twohey). This was an important story and headline. However, it didn’t gain near as much attraction as the fake news story from ConservativeState.com. The New York Times story only “generated a little more than 175,000 Facebook interactions in a month” (Silverman and Alexander). This information is important because it validates the influence that fake news can be successfully utilized through digital media. This study helped bring about more attention to the danger and influence that fake news can have through digital and social media channels.

Another example of a fake news story centered around Donald Trump was that Pope Francis endorsed Donald Trump for President. The news story went viral throughout Facebook and other sites like Reddit and 4chan. However, Pope Francis and the Catholic Church quickly denounced the claim and stating that it was false. Pope Francis reiterated that popes do not endorse political candidates. He also denounced and emphasized on the danger of fake news. Pope Francis said that “Disinformation is probably the greatest damage that the media can do, as opinion is guided in one direction, neglecting the other part of the truth” (www.apnews.com).

This was an important declaration because it shows that even an important global figure states the dangers of fake news and it's powers of manipulation and division.

Next we move on to the Post-Election portion on fake news during the 2016 Presidential Election. There have been numerous examples of fake news being used or being associated with the Trump administration. The first massive fake news story about the election actually took place after it. This event would be known as Pizzagate. One example of this would be Pizzagate. Pizzagate was an event that happened in late 2016 where an armed shooter walked into a D.C

pizza restaurant expecting to find a pedophilia ring associated with Hillary Clinton. Edgar Welch, the shooter, was an individual who frequented sites like 4chan and Reddit and engaged frequently in conspiracy sub-reddits. "He decided he would drive up from North Carolina and free the children locked up in Comet's basement. Luckily, he was focused enough on his objective to not harm patrons or staff until he

had found the children, so he used the threat of his guns to keep anyone from touching him while he shot the lock off a door and generally investigated to his heart's content." (Breiner). The



Figure 6: Infograph containing all the supposed links and connected stories of Pizzagate.

Taken from: www.vox.com

theory that inspired his action had been circulating the internet for a short while. The theory was that “Podesta’s repeated use of the wopizza in emails detailed in the WikiLeaks release was actually a code word for pedophilia. Comet Ping Pong was allegedly the base for secret rooms in which Clinton and her allies kidnapped and imprisoned children to be sexually abused, tortured or even sacrificed in the name of Satan” (Gillian). This theory, while proven to be fake, went viral over the internet and even made its way into some fake news programs like Infowars. “The rumor first began after WikiLeaks released Clinton campaign manager John Podesta’s emails. Users at the online forum 4Chan noticed Podesta corresponded with Comet Ping Pong pizzeria owner James Alefantis, discussing a potential Clinton fundraiser.” (Gillin). For the uninitiated, 4chan is a message board where content is “broken up into threads where users can discuss different topics, everything from civet coffee to sex toys, and something like 22 million users do just that every month” (Dewey).

It’s infamous as the birthplace of the hacktivist group Anonymous as well as widespread internet trolling. Therefore it’s important that a place like 4chan would push out conspiracy theories to create drama and entertainment for its users. In any case, the fake theory gained a lot of traction with websites and media outlets that hated Hillary

Clinton. 4chan, Infowars, and even and sub-reddit in Reddit called The_Donald picked up the



Figure 7: Alex Jones’ tweet in support of Pizzagate. He would later purge numerous fake news articles and reports regarding the fake theory.

Taken from www.liberalamerica.org

story and pushed it out heavily regardless of its accuracy. This is especially important because the owner, James Alefantis, “has never met Clinton” (Gillin). He proceeded to get death threats from social media users which made him and his employees nervous. Not only that, but according to him his “Facebook and Yelp pages were flooded with obscene “reviews.” The



Figure 8: Michael Flynn Jr.'s Tweet regarding Pizzagate.
 Taken from: www.bbc.com

restaurant's phone rang off the hook, with people calling and screaming at the hosts.” (Alfantis). This culminated with Welch coming into James' restaurant with a loaded rifle screaming in hopes of finding the children on “December 4, 2016” (Gillin).

After Welch was taken away,

many thought that this would be the end of the fake theory. Unfortunately this was not to be the case. Pizzagate's immediate response captivated the country for months to come. Both traditional and digital media companies covered the event extensively and mainly focusing on the shooter and the evidence disproving the theory. However, some saw the coverage as a cover up for the real theory. Some took to Twitter while others like Alex Jones from Infowars loudly proclaimed the theories credibility. Alex Jones later apologized to the owner saying “In our commentary about what had become known as Pizzagate, I made comments about Mr. Alefantis that in hindsight I regret, and for which I apologize to him” (Shelbourne). However, he wasn't the only

influential individuals to criticize the media for not supporting the theory. One of these would be Michael Flynn Jr., son of the retired U.S Army Lt. General and former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn. Michael Flynn Jr. He expressed his support of the theory on Twitter saying that he believed in the accusations. His tweet was mixed with a lot of negative press. Even now though, the fake news story regarding Pizzagate and its cover-up are still being discussed today. There are users on 4chan and reddit who still express belief t the theory and that the media covered it up. Not only that but it proved the dangerous potential and influence that fake news has on its readers.

The next fake news story that circulated had President-Elect Trump involved this time as well. This fake news story was about Trump’s inauguration size. This controversy began on January 21, 2017, which was a day after his presidential inauguration. President Trump stated the



Figure 9: A photograph of Obama’s 2009 inauguration.

Taken from: <https://www.nytimes.com/>



Figure 10: A photograph of Trump’s 2017 inauguration.

Taken from: <https://www.nytimes.com/>

morning after that media organizations were downsizing the amount of people that attending his inauguration. He claims to have seen what “looked like a million-and-a-half people” and “went all the way back to the Washington Monument”

(Robertson and Farley). He claims that his inauguration was bigger than President Obama’s and thusly was the most televised inauguration in history. However it’s important to note that it is estimated that Obama’s Inaugural size was suggested at around “1.8 million people attended the

inauguration” (Klein). We are able to gather this through ticket sales and organized metropolitan transport systems heading to the National Mall. The evidence that was at hand and was researched deemed that Trump’s accusation of the media and his own assessment of his size were wrong. One of the key factors into disproving the misinformation was pictures taken from aerial view of both Trump and both of Obama’s Inauguration sizes. It’s important to note in these pictures that it’s not possible to get the full view and number of attendees at both. However, it’s easy to surmise that Obama’s inauguration size was bigger by looking at the photos. It’s also crucial to know that the “footage on this page was captured 45 minutes before each oath of office” (Wallace, Yourish and Griggs).

However, many Trump voters believed in the fake news and information that the administration was pushing out. In order to combat this the Washington Post conducted a survey towards Trump voters which asked them how they feel about the difference between Obama’s and Trumps inaugurations. They “surveyed 1,388 American adults. We showed half of them a crowd picture from each inauguration and asked which was from Trump’s inauguration and which was from Obama’s” (Schaffner and Luks). The pictures were of both Obama’s 2009 inauguration and Trump’s 2017 one. Trumps was labeled picture A and Obama’s was labeled picture B. The survey also asked whether which picture had the most people in it. Their reasoning for asking this was to indicate bias towards to the other president. Washington Post knew that many Trump voters would know who had the larger inauguration size but it was important for them to know whether Trump voters were “admitting that there were more people in the image on the right would mean they were acknowledging that more people attended Obama’s inauguration.” (Schaffner and Luks). This was important for the Washington Post to have analytical research regarding the effect misinformation and political bias has on people.

Their answer to the second question was a simple yes. Trump voters were more likely to give wrong answers to both questions in an effort to defend their candidate. The Washington Post reported that “In both cases, people who said that they had voted for Trump in 2016 were significantly more likely to answer the questions wrong than those who voted for Clinton or those who said they did not vote at all.” (Schaffner and Luks). Also in regards to the first question “41 percent of Trump supporters gave the wrong answer” (Schaffner and Luks).

However, this ties into fake news through several reasons. The first one was that President Trump ended up using a picture taken from Obama’s inauguration as used it as the background photo for the new POTUS Twitter account. The photo was actually “taken in 2009, at Barack Obama's swearing in” (Bort). This is an established procedure now though for Presidential Social Media Accounts to transfer archived picture’s and posts to the successor. However, the Trump administration took the Obama inauguration photo in order to make their inauguration size bigger. This, compounded by the Trump administrations attacks on the press for citing factual information made many seem weary and more research was done. The other reason was that the administration’s explanation of citing wrongful evidence was called alternative facts. During a White House Press Conference briefing, White House press secretary Sean Spicer continually claimed false estimates towards to size of the presidential inauguration. This was met with overwhelmingly negative reception with most media news netowkrs saying that Spicer’s comments were false. However, Kellyanne Conway, a White House advisor, claimed in an interview on NBC’s Meet the Press that “You're saying it's a falsehood. And they're giving -- Sean Spicer, our press secretary -- gave alternative facts,” (Bradner). In the same interview she also stated that it’s not the job of the press to question the statements and beliefs of the current administration. She quoted “Your job is not to call things ridiculous that are said by

our press secretary and our president” (Bradner). Many across the media landscape called Conway’s remarks as dangerous, and enabling propaganda and fake news as a political tool. Dan Rather, anchor for CBS’ Evening News, was more vocal in his opposition of the term alternative facts. He stated that the “idea of “alternate facts” is a propaganda tool. Yes, I used the word “propaganda” – a propaganda tool in order to confuse people” (DePaolo). This usage of the term alternative facts gave fake news writers a plethora of material to work on and many more news articles regarding the size of the inauguration and other stories bloomed after the phrase was uttered.

One of the first instances of the Trump Administration utilizing the concept of alternative facts would be an incident known as the Bowling Green Massacre. The Bowling Greene Massacre was an exaggerated fake story told by Kellyanne Conway in an effort to justify President Trump’s immigration ban. “I bet it’s brand new information to people that President Obama had a six-month ban on the Iraqi refugee program after two Iraqis came here to this country, were radicalized and were the masterminds behind the Bowling Green massacre” (Coscarelli). This was a

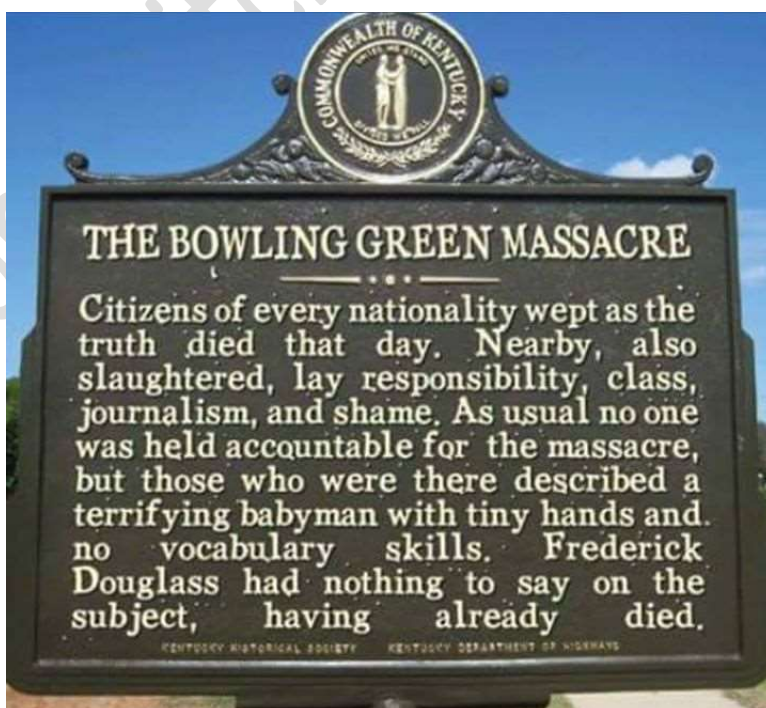


Figure 11: A humorous meme making fun of the Bowling Green Massacre

Taken from: www.miami.cbslocal.com

massacre committed by two radicalized insurgents in retaliation to President Obama’s six-month immigration ban. The Trump Administration’s motive to push out the fake story was to detract

the public from the ban and make it seem like it was justified. The massacre was proclaimed by them as a very serious event. However, for many journalists, it was a confusing story because no one knew what she was talking about. However the closest related incident that coincides with the Trump Administration's story happened in Bowling Green, Kentucky. This incident happened in May of 2011 and it involved two Iraqi citizens "Mohanad Shareef Hammadi and Waad Ramadan Alwan" (Coscarelli). These two individuals were attempting to smuggle money and weapons to Al Qaeda in Iraq. The defendants were caught and found guilty. There were no murders nor anything resembling a massacre. The story was quickly debunked and became a viral internet sensation. Commenters from all across the digital media landscape were making memes and fun of the fake story and justification. "With jabs like "Never Remember" and "I survived the Bowling Green massacre" (<http://miami.cbslocal.com>).

The result of this episode has changed the way the media and even how some of the public view the current administration. People were worried that President Trump and his administration would heavily use fake stories and propaganda in order to push out their agenda. This event played directly into public concerns that the Trump administration would use these methods to rally public support. It also reinforced the public that the administration would use their own fabricated information, as well as other networks that support the administration. By using their own information, and the support of networks like Fox and Breitbart, the administration would attack and criticize mainstream media outlets that disagree with the administration's policies, actions, and beliefs. The Trump administration utilizes fake news in various ways. The first way would be to attack and continue to keep the loyalty of this voter base. The second reason would be using the term fake news as a weapon. Trump has called mainstream media fake news as a weapon to delegitimize their stories, especially if they are fact

checking his statements and policies. In this way he is attacking the credibility of news networks like (list sources). He commonly does this on his Twitter account and through interviews.

One of the most famous examples of him criticizing and delegitimizing mainstream media networks was when he called "New York Times, NBC, ABC, CBS and CNN are not his enemy but "the enemy of the American People" (Johnson and Gold). This attack was prompted by media coverage and stories regarding the Trump administration and Michael



Donald J. Trump 
@realDonaldTrump

The FAKE NEWS media (failing @nytimes, @NBCNews, @ABC, @CBS, @CNN) is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American People!

4:48pm · 17 Feb 2017 · Twitter for Android

1,600 REPLIES 1,649 RETWEETS 5,592 LIKES



Figure 12: Trump's anti-mainstream media tweet.
Taken from: <http://www.mcclatchydc.com>

Flynn, his national security advisor, resigning due to Russian ties. As quoted by the New York Times, Michale Flynn resign because he it was revealed "that he had misled Vice President Mike Pence and other top White House officials about his conversations with the Russian ambassador to the United States " (Haberman, Rosenberg, Apuzzo & Thrush). This was huge because there has been numerous speculation by the press and the American public over President Trump's connection to Russia. Not only that but many believe that Russia had an impact on the election and it's results. These speculations were created from the numerous records showing Trump with financial ties to Russia, his statements regarding Russia's Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, and the campaigns usage of fake news and propaganda which is similar to methods to situations in Russia. One of the biggest ties to his Russia ties was him asking Russia to hack into Hillary

Clinton's emails in an effort to reveal information about her private server that she used when she was the Secretary of State. This happened during a campaign rally in 2016 where he quoted "I will tell you this, Russia: If you're listening, I hope you're able to find the 30,000 emails that are missing" (Crowley and Pager). Eventually the Democratic National Committees' email was hacked revealing private information regarding Hillary Clinton, John Podesta, and various members of the Democratic Party. In response to this, over seventeen U.S. intelligence agencies agreed that Russia was behind several hacking incidents" (William). One of the top reasons for this theory were the thousands of Russian fake news accounts and bots that appeared all over social media. Many of these bots were Pro-Trump. Not only that but "At least a third of pro-Trump tweets during the election came from bots, and half of Trump's most engaged Twitter followers are bots" (Williams). This was a huge revelation because it reinforces the idea that the digital landscape can massively impact public opinion. Fake news in this regard, is a major issue that can deceive people. In any case, anytime a Russian allegation comes up or is revealed to be tied to the Trump campaign, he goes on the offensive and will claim that the organization that leaks the information is fake news. Fake news sites will then normally confirm Trump's statements about these allegations. His attack in mid-February was an example of him going on the offensive towards these media networks.

This attack proves the public's concerns for President's Trump's dissatisfaction for bad coverage and the first amendment. "Insert first amendment quote and libel". Trump's attacks on the media were met with overwhelmingly negative response. Some of the responses were claiming him to be acting like a dictator, due to authoritarian regimes usually attacking the press. Senator John McCain's response Trump's attacks was about preserving the integrity of the press and cementing the fact that dictators tend to have media and free press. He stated that

authoritarian regimes “get started by suppressing free press. In other words, a consolidation of power. When you look at history, the first thing that dictators do is shut down the press” (Landay and Shalal). He went on to further state that Trump isn’t a dictator but we need to learn from history to prevent authoritarian regimes from happening.

The information provided in this chapter is an important piece of information that can be used to fight fake news and misinformation. Knowing the history, its usage, and impact that it has on a society can be instrumental in identifying these fake stories and companies. Learning from history for a society to learn from its mistakes and move forward. By understanding the history of fake news and information, it makes individuals more aware of patterns in their methods. Not only that but understanding how fake news impacted the 2016 Presidential Election is important in understanding fake news. The election proved that fake news can be utilized through almost every conceivable platform. Also understanding President Trump’s attacks on legitimate news sources while ignoring fake news is important. The administration’s continual attacks upon the fourth estate could pose serious consequences. The press’ role in a democracy is to report the facts. This way, the public can create their own opinions about the actions of their country’s leaders and policies. The Trump’s administration’s assertions that mainstream media, especially the Fourth Estate, are all dishonest and fake can create confusion within the public. It’s also an attack on the first amendment which is a vital element to a democracy and to the American Constitution. His willingness to ignore facts and data, and supplant them with his own narrative can be problematic and frightening to many. This is what fake news, misinformation, propaganda, and alternative facts can do. They distort what is real and what’s not and that can create a very dangerous precedent. If a stretched fake news story can compel an individual to walk into a pizza parlor with an assault rifle, then who knows what

more chaos and damage a plethora of fake news can do with an administration that utilizes it.

Therefore, understanding the Trump Administration's usage of fake news and struggle with mainstream media can help identify patterns in which fake news can be identified.

Understanding its adaptability throughout history can help dispel the famous notion that history repeats itself. This is a key step in fighting the spread of fake news.

Property of John Mitchell Price

Ch.3: Methodologies And Businesses

Fake news currently is a major trend and issue in the media landscape currently. As we know, fake news is a deliberate attempt of spreading misinformation through both traditional and digital means. However, in order to combat fake news, it's important to know how fake news organizations operate. This means it's important to understand the business tactics of these organizations and how they remain financially profitable. A better understanding of how these organizations are run helps identifying them and their practices easier.

Creating a business model for fake news is a tricky endeavor that requires insight into the digital media landscape. Individuals must know various digital marketing skills in order to maximize their audience and content reach. Back in the 20th century it was more difficult to make money off of fake news and misinformation. This is because of several different reasons such as strict regulations, add the cost of distributing news, and that reaching an audience was harder. The Internet changed this into allowing fake news to flourish by ignoring several of journalistic and information barriers. Telegraph illustrates this sentiment by describing the three barriers of information and how they were undone by the internet. These barriers were “distribution and cost, audiences and trust, and laws and regulations” (Carson). The fake news sites on the internet then proceed to modify or even jump over these barriers to gain audiences and traffic. The Internet is a major factor into how fake news organizations function. The internet allows them to make a profit from all its various platforms and channels. The deconstruction of these barriers the business model for how fake news sites are operated and finically viable. These sites and operators want a large amount of traffic to their sites and articles because that's how they get profit and sponsorships. “Optimizing the website for search engines, promoting it on social media and through paid-for advertising is something that must constantly be done

for getting website traffic” (www.prchecker.net). A busy website means more opportunity for profit, traffic, and ads.

As we know, Fake News utilizes various forms of websites, social media, and digital media platforms. These modes of information are essential to how fake news company’s work and function. Writers have to be familiar with various channels of content distribution in order to reach a larger audience. They’ll also have to understand various cultures, customs, and political and societal problems from which they can hook viewers into their content. They utilize a number of tactics for each platform in order to stay relevant and maintain readers and viewers. These tactics would include targeting political bias, clickbait headlines, and utilizing various media channels. These media channels are websites, social media platforms, and YouTube. These tactics are to be ingrained with how these sites and organizations become financially profitable.

It’s now considerably easier to make a fake news site thanks to website creation programs like WordPress that charges users a small fee or even offers a limited free account to publish content on. This helps minimize cost so that writers can focus their finances on marketing and advertising on several digital platforms. WordPress can help create websites and publish blogposts from which the writers and producers of the fake news can push out their content. Creating a blog is a very important step. Blogs are huge in the digital world and so it would be practical for these individuals to utilize their massive audience appeal. It’s also important to detail that the end result for most fake news methods is for the viewers to come and visit the website. Once an individual is on the website it counts as traffic and a click. It doesn’t matter if anyone reads the article, because all that matters is if a viewer visits the site. One of the main ways that these organizations and writers accumulate profit would be from Google’s AdSense.

AdSense as is defined as “a free, simple way to make money online by placing ads on your website” ([AdSense](#)). AdSense is a program that helps do both for a fake news website. Many websites and blogs on the internet make their money from this method. AdSense helps user’s monitor traffic and website visit, sort and view clicks and impressions, and give users profit from their websites. The more clicks, views, and sponsors a website has, the more desirable to other advertisers it becomes. However Google gets a larger portion of the profits from your website by using it. In any case, it’s important to know how people make money from AdSense. There are two ways to make money from this program as explained by Nuts and Bolts Media. They describe the two methods as Impressions and Clicks. “Impressions is based on the number of page views of pages or posts with ads and Clicks is based on how many people click on the ads” (Whitmer). This is how fake news websites and blogs utilize AdSense to accumulate data and profit for their content. They use the data to help see what headlines and articles bring in more viewers and clicks and then proceed to reorganize and create different content to work with the data. AdSense is also important because it ties in with how social media sites bring in viewers to these social media websites. Social media sites are a major source for fake news. It’s a major financial and traffic based conduit through which these sites make their profit and expand. Social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, are prime sites for fake news accounts and platforms. However, Facebook has more of an issue with fake news than Twitter. There are several reasons for this. The first reason is that Facebook is easy to use and people are getting their news from the site more and more. A poll conducted by Journalism.org claimed that a majority of Facebook users are getting their news from Facebook. Over “Two-thirds of Facebook users (66%) get news on the site” (Gottfried and Shearer). Since so many users are getting their information for Facebook, it stands to reason that many wouldn’t know if the news they were reading was real or

fake. People tend to be more impatient on social media and they want a news article summarized quickly and succinctly. This is where clickbait headlines and articles come into picture. Clickbait headlines are a standard business practice for most fake news websites and organizations. It's hard for news companies to make money because of the oversaturation in the news market. There are so many different news organizations, websites, and platforms which has created different methods of acquiring viewers and readers. Clickbait came around to target Google and Facebook's search and news algorithm to stay relevant. Creating a sensationalist headline will bring in a larger amount of viewers unsuspectingly. According to Anna Escher from TechCrunch, "Publishers are constantly challenged by changing algorithms and the task of reframing and optimizing stories for social distribution" (Escher and Ha). A solid clickbait headline with an eye-catching photograph is an excellent way to get people's attention. This is how they get their clicks, views, and shares from their social media pages to even their websites. Clickbait headlines are a major component of their success and a cornerstone for any functional fake news organization. This is why it thrives on social media because people generally have short attention spans on social media and sometimes will only look at a headline and not the content itself. In order to get people to read their content, they'll have to buy advertising on their sites. They do this by placing ads on your newsfeed. The better the ad, the more "likely to generate many more qualified leads" (Baldassarre). This will collect clicks and website traffic which will make their website more prominent and desirable for sponsors and AdSense. Writers of fake news on websites and social media will also get paid for the number of shares and likes. BuzzFeed's story validates this claim on several of the Macedonian teen fake news writers. As explained earlier, BuzzFeed did an investigation into a small Macedonian town that was gaining a lot of traffic due to a rise in pro-Trump articles and websites. The investigation revealed that many of the writers

were teens who were utilizing Facebook to “to publish sensationalist and often false content that caters to Trump supporters” (Silverman and Alexander). BBC did more research into this story by conducting an interview with a fake news writer that reveals “he worked on the fakery for only a month and earned about 1,800 euros (£1,500)” (Kirby). This proves that it’s a profitable profession if you know your material and utilize social and digital media marketing.

Another reason as to why Facebook is a popular tool for fake news organizations and businesses is because of its algorithms. The more popular a Facebook post is, the more it’ll spread on those sites and gain more viral traction. This was proved true during the 2016 election. Facebook was a hotbed for countless fake news stories being filtered and shared with others. The political election made Facebook a platform from which millions of people to espouse their political beliefs. Fake news became rampant during this time as people wanted to use political discussion and turmoil as a means to meet the political ideas of others. These fake news articles and posts were targeted towards different political demographics. The Washington Post claimed that fake news articles found on Facebook targeted specific partisan demographics in the hope of them going viral. “They were seeded into conservative and liberal filter bubbles through hyper partisan media organizations with enormous numbers of Facebook followers” (Ohlheiser). By targeting a bias audience, they will tend to appreciate and agree with an article that aligns with their beliefs and worldviews.

YouTube is another major sight where fake news is utilized and prevalent. One particular instance would be the rise of prank and social experiment channels. Social Experiments that cater to partisan and social politics are a real breadwinner among their platform. They utilize social issues and turn them into a money making opportunity online. They make their money from YouTube by sponsors and AdSense. It’s a common misconception that YouTube is the one

paying its content creators. In actuality it's actually sponsorships and from AdSense. YouTube has changed its profit algorithm several times and is now focusing on total watch time.

YouTubers with more watch time and views on their videos are generally going to make more money than others. This is calculated by the number of minutes viewers watch videos in entirety. If viewers are watching a channels videos fully then the creator will acquire a larger profit. It's a difficult process to calculate but a response from Quora explains that "YouTube will pay a YouTuber, on average, between \$0.75 to \$2.00* per 1 thousand views." (Siqueira).

Knowing the personal details of business practices, and financial information of fake news organizations is crucial to fighting their spread. The saying know your enemy is very relevant to identifying and fighting disinformation. Understanding the business information and strategies of fake news organizations helps make them easier to find. Even though technology and media strategies are always changing, it's important to know the basic details of each in order to identify outliers and problems. These organizations rely on the tactics and business methods above to stay relevant and make profit. Business tactics may change but the core strategies rarely do. By focusing the attention on the strategies and methodologies of these organizations, we can identify them more easily and put a stop to their spread and profit accumulation.

Fake News Organizations

One of the keys to stopping fake news would be to identifying them. In this chapter, I'll be explain several examples of fake news organizations. This will include their history, examples of their work, and their current status. This is important because many fake news organizations tend to be using an umbrella structure. This means that they are many are connected by the same owners and writers. By understanding how these organizations work, individuals will be able to

more easily identify them through patterns and research.

The first fake news organization that will be discussed in this chapter will also be one of the biggest and most popular: Infowars. Infowars is a conspiracy and fake news site created and run by Alex Jones. Alex Jones is a noted conspiracy theorist whose theories usually have to do with new world order and how the government and international companies are working together against the world. Common subjects he likes to talk about include mind control, secret world orders, and evil politicians. He has a very boisterous on-air persona that has become the source of entertainment and memes to many online communities and on air comedians. He has two websites, infowars.com and prisonplanet.com. He supports his fake and conspiracy theories through the websites mentioned above. The more popular of the two websites would be Infowars. Through Infowars, Alex and his team push out conspiracy theories, as well as fake news articles. From his website, Alex hosts a syndicated show that talks about his theories and beliefs with stretch and minimal sources. However, despite the content of his network, it's become very popular as "Jones's audience is estimated to be around 2 million listeners on the radio alone, spread out on a whopping 60 stations nationwide" (Cesca). One of these fans would be President Trump. President Trump has even appeared on Jones' show several times and has stated on air that "'Your reputation is amazing'" (Bradner).

One of the major example of Alex Jones and Infowars peddling fake news and misinformation would be his involvement with Pizzagate. Jones was not the author of the theory, but helped in its spread through his show and website. He would go on to create a video, which was posted shortly before the event that "purported to link a number of high-profile pedophilia cases to a major operation led by former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and her campaign chief John Podesta and using underground tunnels to traffic young children through the city"

(O'Connor). His support and promotion of the theory fell upon the ears of the Edgar Welch, the shooter, who claims that he is a fan of the program. Alex's support of the theory lingered well after the event until public pressure forced Alex to publicly apologize about the role in spreading the theory and the fake news around it. Alex Jones publicly stated that "I want our viewers and listeners to know that we regret any negative impact our commentaries may have had on Mr. Alefantis, Comet Ping Pong, or its employees. We apologize to the extent our commentaries could be construed as negative statements about Mr. Alefantis or Comet Ping Pong, and we hope that anyone else involved in commenting on Pizzagate will do the same thing" (O'Connor). The apology was met with mixed reaction on the internet. Many believing that this was a publicity stunt. In any case, Jones' involvement with the story and fake news proved that fake news can be dangerous in the wrong hands. Any fake news information can inspire others to commit dangerous actions against the subjects detail in the false stories. This is proven correct not just by Wlech's attempted shooting, but the death threats that the restaurant's owner Mr. Alefantis, received. Not only did he received threats towards him and his employees, but also that Alex Jones' role in "encouraging its followers to out and investigate the Pizzagate conspiracy theory" (Farhi). Infowars has routinely told its audience and followers to seek the truth out for themselves, especially if the story they are viewing is fake. This creates a dangerous precedence of vigilante investigation and justice. Both of which can end badly for individuals with no experience in either and are only committing these acts due to false and limited information.

A second example of a fake news story pushed out by Alex Jones and Infowars would be their false allegation against yogurt company Chobani. The fake story that was created claimed that Chobani. "Was linked to a sexual assault case involving three refugee children" (<https://news.fastcompany.com>). The company is noted for hiring refugees, which are a major

component of many of Alex Jones' conspiracy theories. The story's explanation for the refugees not speaking out against the company was because of a large left-wing cover up. Police investigated the story and the company and found nothing to back up the story's claims. After this investigation, Chobani has repeatedly asked Alex Jones to take down the story due to false allegations and inaccurate coverage and research. Alex and Infowars did not respond which lead to Chobani calling a lawsuit against Infowars. The company's defense states that "Chobani claims Infowars violated the Idaho Consumer Protection Act by knowingly misrepresenting facts that were harmful to its business. The company seeks at least \$10,000 in damages, attorney fees, and punitive damages" (<https://news.fastcompany.com>). This is one of the several times that Alex Jones has been facing lawsuits for fake news and false allegations.

Another fake news network would be Disinformation. Disinformation was created by a man named "Jestin Coler" (Sydell). NPR did an interview with him about how fake news works and how his business became successful. The interview revealed that Jestin is the head of an engineering company by day in California, has a family, and is a "registered Democrat" (Sydell). However, Jestin always had an interest in politics and news cycles, and was particularly concerned with the rise of fake news within Alt-Right circles and communities. This rise in the alt-right political movement inspired him to change their minds in their ideas and behavior. It was this in mind that "he got into fake news around 2013 to highlight the extremism of the white nationalist alt-right" (Sydell). The reasoning for this was to test the believability of fake news with the extreme right wing groups and then explain to them why they were wrong in believing in. He says that "The whole idea from the start was to build a site that could kind of infiltrate the echo chambers of the alt-right, publish blatantly or fictional stories and then be able to publicly denounce those stories and point out the fact that they were fiction" (Sydell). He was hoping to

change their worldview in the hopes of making them more tolerable of other cultures, and to increase their critical thinking skills. However, his stories were spread quickly which surprised

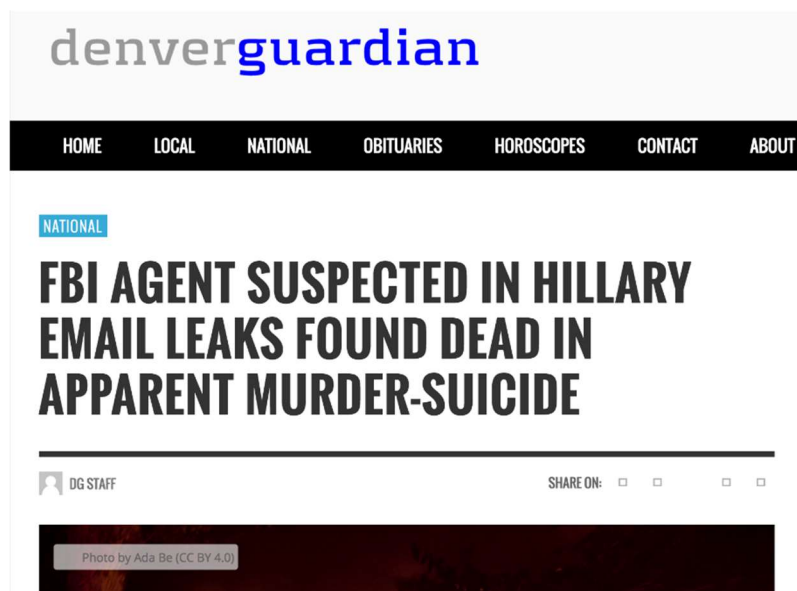


Figure 13: Headline for the infamous Denver Guardian Hillary story. It was removed shortly afterwards.
Taken from: www.npr.org

him. One of the stories that was wildly shared was a story that was posted on the fake news site “NationalReport.net” (Sydell). The fake story was centered on how Coloradoans were using food stamps to buy marijuana. What was supposed to be a small fake news story ended up going viral and causing a commotion in the state of Colorado. The news story had such an impact that “a state representative in the

House in Colorado proposing actual legislation to prevent people from using their food stamps to buy marijuana” (Sydell). It was this instant propulsion of the story that ended up inspiring him to write more fake news. This would eventually lead to him creating Disinfomedia, which is a fake news company that owns several different fake news sites. He also claims that Disinfomedia is “one of the biggest fake-news businesses out there” (Sydell). His company has maintains a healthy supply of writers. One of which “wrote the story in the Denver Guardian” (Sydell). The Denver Guardian is an infamous fake news story that circulated in the last days of the 2016 US Presidential Election. The Denver Guardian was a fake news source that rose to prominence during the last days of the 2016 United States Presidential Election. The site also claimed to be Denver’s “oldest news source” (Lubbers). The story that circulated from the fake sites was about how an FBI agent who supposedly leaked Hillary Clinton’s email was killed. The story blew up

within right-wing and conspiracy theory communities. According to Jestin, “that over 10 days the site got 1.6 million views” (Sydell). This large influx of traffic was making him profit from the views and ads. Through this, he started to create more and more fake news sites and stories. However despite the growth and profit, he denies that money is the entire incentive to keep creating these stories. To him, it’s about showing how fast fake news spreads and its effects on society. Unfortunately, he believes that fake news organizations are growing rapidly. He believes that not only will fake news will grow, but that these fake stories and news sites “will only get harder to tell their websites from real news sites. They know now that fake news sells and they will only be in it for the money” (Sydell).

Knowing big fake news networks is an important step into identifying them as well. Knowing the network, authors, and stories can help with the deduction of a fake story. It’s through this research of knowing which site is fake r not means all the difference in spreading fake news. Know that several big name fake news companies have been discussed, its time to know why fake news works.

Ch. 4: How Fake News Works

Fake News resonates strongly with audiences around the world through variety of factors and reasons. Some of these would include political bias, neurological and counter-knowledge. All of these factors help spread the influence of fake news on several platforms.

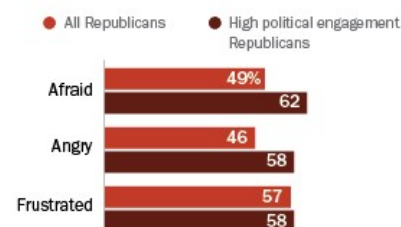
The first factor into how fake news works is through political bias. Political bias severely impacts fake news and misinformation. Therefore it's incredibly important to understand the differing political biases of today's political media landscape. Understanding the differences can help identify why fake news works well within political biased reporting and journalism. In today's modern media, it's extremely easy to promote one's opinions through a variety of platforms. Whether the platforms are traditional or digital, it's important to note that people will gravitate towards beliefs and opinions that closely align with their own. "Our political views stem for out notions of what is normal, responsible, moral, and reasonable" (Fleming). Political views and bias can be formed from individual's life experiences. Not only can that but also customs and cultures also form an individual's thoughts and worldview. These factors all help in creating different subsections of belief structures and communities. Some of these would be labeled many different things, however some of the biggest would be conservative and liberal bias and lifestyles. Conservative, as defined by [Dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com), is "disposed to preserve existing conditions, institutions, etc., or to restore traditional ones, and to limit change" (www.dictionary.com). This means that conservative individuals are more concerned with traditional and even religious values. Many would rather keep the values they had instilled in at a younger age instead of adopting newer ones. Examples of this would be "Traditional family values and the sanctity of marriage, a small, non-invasive government, a strong national defense focused on protection and the fight against terrorism, a commitment to faith and religion, and the

right to life for every human being” (Fleming). These values resonate strongly with conservative audiences which is why some fake news articles will create false stories on abortion, terrorist attacks and threats, and even negative articles about liberal or left-leaning politicians and individuals. It’s through evaluating these values that we are able to see what news information is catering to a conservative bias and audience. Some news sites that tend to be conservative would be “Fox News, The Blaze, and Young Conservative” (Redflagnews.com). Whereas Dictionary.com defines liberal as “favorable to progress or reform, as in political or religious affairs” (Dictionary.com). This would mean that liberal individuals want progression in society and politics. They “believe in government action to achieve equal opportunity and equality for all. It is the duty of the government to alleviate social ills and to protect civil liberties and individual and human rights” (Studentnewsdaily.com). They also generally oppose conservatives in most political and social matters. Some news sites that would cater to liberals are “CNN, NPR and MSNBC” (Mitchell et al).

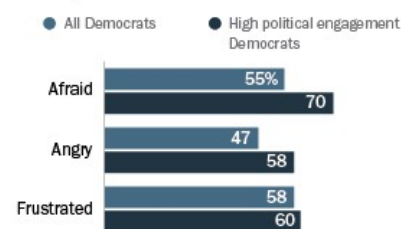
It’s important to know the distinctions between the two opposing political ideologies, especially in this politically tumultuous climate. It’s important to understand that both parties are very opposed to each other on almost every issue. A survey conducted on Partisanship and Political Animosity by the Pew Research Center concluded that “fully 70% of Democrats and 62% of Republicans say they are afraid of the other party” (Fingerhut). This is important to know because it highlights the

Frustration, fear and anger among partisans

% of **Republicans** who say the **Democratic Party** makes them feel ...



% of **Democrats** who say the **Republican Party** makes them feel ...



Note: Engagement scale based on voting frequency, campaign volunteerism and/or contributions. See Appendix A for details. Source: Survey conducted March 2-28 and April 5-May 2, 2016.

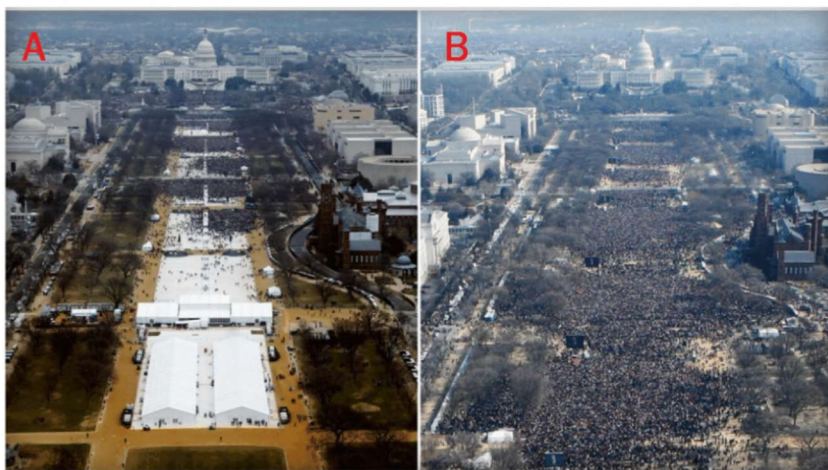
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 14: Infographic showing data detail frustration between Democrats and Republicans in terms of fear and anger.

Taken from: www.people-press.org

division between not only the political parties but also the partisanship between those who believe in them. People are staying with their party and ideology because they are either angered or afraid of the other's opposing ideals. The survey conducted highlight this thought b stating "Sixty-eight percent of Republicans, and 62 percent of Democrats, say they're members of their

Please look at the following two photos: Photo A and Photo B.



Which photo has more people?

☐ Photo A has more people

☐ Photo B has more people

Figure 15: Picture from partsisan loyalty that is comparing both Trump's (A) and Obama's (B) inauguration size. This was used to test partisan loyalty.
Taken from www.washingtonpost.com

own party in large part because they believe the opposing party's policies are bad for the country" (Fingerhut). An example of this partisan loyalty would be a study by the Washington Post that sought to understand partisan loyalty. They did this by conducting a survey based on the sizes of both Barack Obama and Donald Trump's Presidential Inauguration sizes. However, many

Trump voters believed in the fake news and information that the administration was pushing out. In order to combat this the Washington Post conducted a survey towards Trump voters which asked them how they feel about the difference between Obama's and Trumps inaugurations. They "surveyed 1,388 American adults. We showed half of them a crowd picture from each inauguration (see below) and asked which was from Trump's inauguration and which was from Obama's" (Schaffner and Luks). The pictures were of both Obama's 2009 inauguration and Trump's 2017 one. Trumps was labeled picture A and Obama's was labeled picture B. The survey also asked whether which picture had the most people in it. Their reasoning for asking

this was to indicate bias towards to the other president. Washington Post knew that many Trump voters would know who had the larger inauguration size but it was important for them to know whether Trump voters were “admitting that there were more people in the image on the right would mean they were acknowledging that more people attended Obama’s inauguration.”

(Schaffner and Luks). This was important for the Washington Post to have analytical research regarding the effect misinformation and political bias has on people. Their answer to the second question was a simple yes. Trump voters were more likely to give wrong answers to both

questions in an effort

to defend their

candidate. The

Washington Post

reported that “In both

cases, people who

said that they had

voted for Trump in

2016 were significantly more

likely to answer the questions

wrong than those who voted for Clinton or those who said they did not vote at all.” (Schaffner

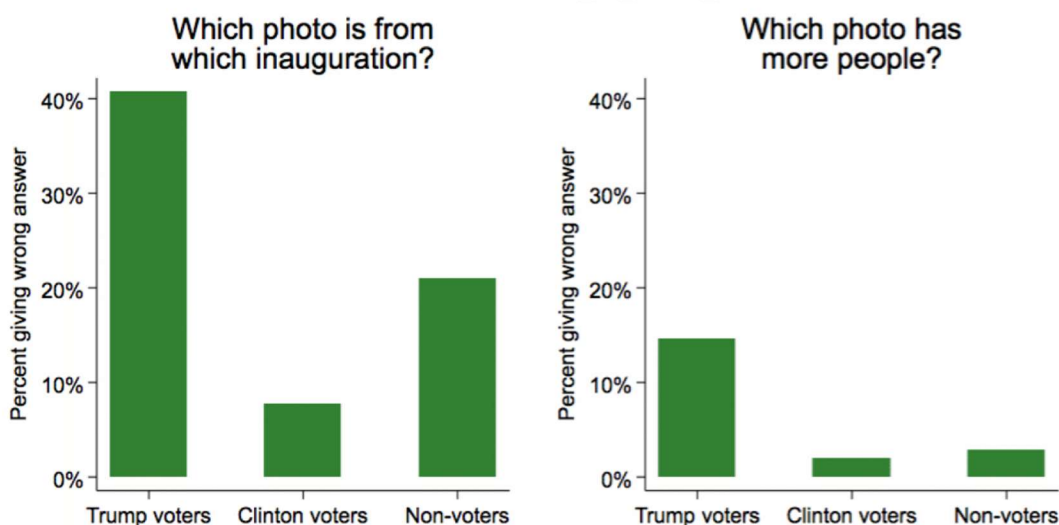
and Luks). What surprised the Washington Post even more was that “15 percent of people who

voted for Trump told us that more people were in the image on the left — the photo from

Trump’s inauguration — than the picture on the right.” (Schaffner and Luks). This means that

Trump voters were more willing to choose the false answer even if there is evidence in front of

them. This is a serious issue because it gives credence to the idea that we in our society are living



Results from YouGov survey of 1,388 respondents fielded 1/22 - 1/23/2017. Weighted to be representative of American adults.

Figure 16: Figure that shows the percentage of people who gave the wrong answer to each question. Trump voters were more likely to answer wrong questions than Clinton voters.

Taken from” www.washingtonpost.com

in the Post-Truth age. Political bias has a direct influence on this sentiment. People are more willing to choose their partisan beliefs than to admit to factual and empirical truth. This can be a problem because political bias can create zealotry which in turn could create brainwashing. People are more willing to believe others who share same ideals than to trust others with information they don't agree with. This changes the very balance of not only the communicative system but also how information is shared. This will also make it harder to hold those in power accountable when they utilize misinformation because they have twisted the minds of their constituents. This study conducted by the Washington Post is extremely important in this regard. It cements the fact that the Trump Administration's utilization of fake news and misinformation is working successfully and will do so until something dramatic happens.

This zealous dedication to one side can distort opinions and enable them to see their own ideals as better. This can destroy bridges of thought and reconciliation with others of opposing viewpoints. This information leads to selective learning and retention. This is what Dan Levitin, author of *Weaponized Lies: How to Think Critically in the Post-Truth Era*, describes as cherry-picking. Levitin believes that "Proper research demands that you keep an open mind about any issue, and try to valiantly consider the evidence for and against, and then from an evidence based conclusion" (Levitin pg. 161). He argues against the process of ignoring other information because the source and information isn't agreeable with you. It's important to keep an open mind in regards to reading the news and information. Having an established bias can and will distort any information you receive in the media. Therefore it's important to keep an open mind and be able to read and enjoy a variety of different news and information sources.

He also talks about a companion to cherry-picking which is called selective windowing. His definition of selective windowing is "when the information you have access to is

unrepresentative of the whole” (Levitin pg.161). This is essentially when individuals who are given a smaller piece of data only use it then instead of understanding the rest of the data. This can be built upon experiences and worldviews. It’s seeing part of the world that we are familiar with and disregarding the bigger picture because it’s different and foreign. This is a problem because it negates the opportunity to understand the greater whole of a story or data. Only using a select portion of information or a lifestyle can create narrowmindedness which doesn’t breed progression or change. This ties in nicely with the connection that fake news and misinformation has with political bias. This line in the sand mentality towards news, information, and politics can lead to bubbles and even echo chambers. These would areas, websites, and avenues of thought and discussion where only individuals of likeminded beliefs and opinions may belong. Anyone who doesn’t agree with the majority is labelled offensive or wrong. This can create a vacuum of stagnancy, regression, and even hostility due to the isolation of other ideas and stories. This can lead to extremes where people will only get their news from outlets that cater to their ideology. This will also make them more loyal to different outlets that cater to these denominations. This is how bias news outlets work. They cater to the belief and worldview of individuals in order to maintain a strong and loyal audience and viewership. These partisan media networks like FOX, Breitbart, and MSNBC cater to a concentrated target audience. “Concentrated ownership of media results in less diversity. This means that the political discourse that shapes the nation is also affected” (Shah). The more specific the audience is, the greater the chance to create odds with other worldviews and beliefs. These networks rely heavily on accommodating their viewership in order to create loyalty. This heavily emphasis allows fake news writers to create stories specifically catered to their taste. Fake news writers and organizations will cater to the extremes in order to satisfy their selective windowing as well.

Therefore it's important to understand that political bias has a large influence on how fake news is spread. The objectivity of media should be fair and balanced. News networks should be giving the unbiased truth on issues, stories, and events. Unfortunately that's hard to do in today's media landscape. So many networks like FOX, CNN, and MSNBC all cater to a partisan worldview. The moment that you let your message become subjugated by the presence of any bias, you move away from the presentation of facts to opinion. This takes away from the message and can alienate viewers and audiences. By catering to a specific set of partisan beliefs, division and separation can happen at a very large level. The US political election is a great example of this. The rift between both ideological parties is very noticeable. So noticeable that the Pew research's study into partisan beliefs and news consumption believes it to be a problem. This creates camps and trenches of ideologues that will only believe in the information that fits within their worldview. This is a prime territory for fake news to work. By playing upon the partisan beliefs of the public, people will believe in things that align with their worldviews. Especially in regards to Trump voters. There have been multiple studies done that have suggested that republicans and conservatives are more likely to believe in fake news stories. However, it's important to understand that those who believe in fake news aren't unintelligent. It's more so on a sense of traditional upbringing, and fear of dangerous threats including terrorism. A study conducted by the academic journal Psychological Science, states that "might be true that conservatives are more likely to fall for false, threatening-seeming information, but it's not because they're dumb. It's because they're hyper-attuned to hazards in their world. If they spot a sign of danger, they figure trusting it is better than ignoring it" (Khazan). It's this fear of danger and liberal beliefs that make fake news such an influence on right-leaning communities.

Another factor of bias and selective windowing is post-truth. Dictionary.com defines post-truth as “Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (www.oxforddictionaries.com). This means that people will deny factual evidence in the face of emotional and personal opinion. Individuals in this age are more willing to listen to their emotions and personal beliefs instead of concrete evidence because it disagrees with their worldview. In this style of thought, facts and science isn’t as important as personal convictions and traditions.

Trump and his administration’s usage of fake news, misinformation, and lies has scholars dubbing the era that we live in now as the Post-Truth Era. The Trump administration’s attacks against both media and science institutions has many in both fields worried and concerned. His claims about media being fake news, while promoting fake stories and publications has workers in both industries worried for their careers and industries. What are institutions to do when they are being claimed as illegitimate? This is what the Trump administration does exceedingly well. The Trump administration’s attacks on the media and science involved the president relentlessly attacking the media as “fake news” while simultaneously peddling false stories and citing genuinely fake news publications himself. The Trump administration has done so well with these tactics that “Time



Figure 17: Time’s cover about post-truth era that’s parodying their famous *Is God Dead?* cover.
Taken from: www.times.com

magazine came right out and asked it on its latest cover: "Is Truth Dead?" With same font and format as the magazine's famous *Is God Dead?* cover from 1966" (Lynch). Trump also managed to say several false things in the interview. One of these was him standing by his statement about thousands of people cheering in New Jersey during 9/11. He stated "I watched in Jersey City, N.J., where thousands and thousands of people were cheering as that building was coming down. Thousands of people were cheering" (Carroll). This quote helped create a fake news story that many of the people cheering were in fact Muslims. However this was revealed to be a fake rumor that was "spawned by chain emails and perpetuated by shock jock Howard Stern's radio show" (Carroll). When confronted by Times about where he found out about this fake news story, he claimed that it was written by a reporter from the "Washington Post" (Carroll). This was another falsehood. In any case, this proves that Trump and his administration's pursuit of using fake news and misinformation as a tactic is making the reality of a post-truth world a reality. Post-truthfulness creates a blur between truth and lies, fact from fiction, and honesty and dishonesty. This post-truthfulness is harmful to society. It creates a fragile social construct that is based on distrust, paranoia, and emotion. These constructs dissolve the strongest foundations of any society which are trust, unity, and progression. Without these foundations, society could crumble underneath the lack of trust, information, and unity. People aren't telling the truth and that bias, cherry-picking, and even the Trump campaign has a hand in ushering humanity into that new era.

Another factor into how fake news spreads and works is through social media. Facebook is the most popular site for fake news organizations to use. Some even claim that Facebook's fake news problem had an impact on the election. However many are still disputing this. Regardless of the outcome, it's important to note that fake news platforms on Facebook do have

Top 5 Fake Election Stories by Facebook Engagement (three months before election)

"Pope Francis Shocks World, Endorses Donald Trump for President, Releases Statement" (960,000, *Ending the Fed*)

"WikiLeaks CONFIRMS Hillary Sold Weapons to ISIS... Then Drops Another BOMBSHELL! Breaking News" (789,000, *The Political Insider*)

"IT'S OVER: Hillary's ISIS Email Just Leaked & It's Worse Than Anyone Could Have Imagined" (754,000, *Ending the Fed*)

"Just Read the Law: Hillary Is Disqualified From Holding Any Federal Office" (701,000, *Ending the Fed*)

"FBI Agent Suspected in Hillary Email Leaks Found Dead in Apparent Murder-Suicide" (567,000, *Denver Guardian*)

ENGAGEMENT REFERS TO THE TOTAL NUMBER OF SHARES, REACTIONS, AND COMMENTS FOR A PIECE OF CONTENT ON FACEBOOK SOURCE: FACEBOOK DATA VIA BUZZSUMO

Figure 18: Infographic on top fake election stories during the course of the election on Facebook.

Taken from: www.buzzfeed.com

Top 5 Mainstream Election Stories by Facebook Engagement (three months before election)

"Trump's History of Corruption Is Mind-Boggling. So Why Is Clinton Supposedly the Corrupt One?" (849,000, *Washington Post*)

"Stop Pretending You Don't Know Why People Hate Hillary Clinton" (623,000, *Huffington Post*)

"Melania Trump's Girl-on-Girl Photos From Racy Shoot Revealed" (531,000, *New York Post*)

"Ford Fact Checks Trump: We Will Be Here Forever" (407,000, *CNN*)

"I Ran the C.I.A. Now I'm Endorsing Hillary Clinton" (373,000, *New York Times*)

ENGAGEMENT REFERS TO THE TOTAL NUMBER OF SHARES, REACTIONS, AND COMMENTS FOR A PIECE OF CONTENT ON FACEBOOK SOURCE: FACEBOOK DATA VIA BUZZSUMO

Figure 19: Infographic on mainstream election stories during the course of the election on Facebook.

Taken from: www.buzzfeed.com

an impact and are a prime example of

how fast and easy

fake news is spread.

One of the reasons

why fake news is so

successful on

Facebook is because

of Facebook's post

and engagement

algorithm. Facebook's algorithm doesn't take news accuracy into consideration. What matters to the algorithm is engagement. If a post generates large amounts of engagement like shares, likes, and comments, then it'll be moved up higher onto newsfeeds. With this system in place, articles with clickbait headlines are more easily able to be placed at the top of newsfeeds where it's most likely to be seen and shared. In many instances, these clickbait using, fake news stories were garnering more engagement than actual accredited mainstream news network posts. BuzzFeed's Craig Silverman conducted a study throughout the course of the presidential election on fake news and Facebook. The study was conducted by monitoring the engagement between fake news stories and stories from real media outlets and sites all the way up until three months before the election. The outcome of the study showed that there was higher engagement on fake news stories than there was from stories that came from actual media outlets. Over the course of the campaign, the "20 top-performing false election stories from hoax sites and hyper partisan blogs generated 8,711,000 shares, reactions, and comments on Facebook" (Silverman). This is a very

large engagement from social media users. Especially since many of them were catered to a very specific worldview and political ideologies. This is important to note because “of the 20 top-performing false election stories identified in the analysis, all but three were overtly pro-Donald Trump or anti-Hillary Clinton” (Silverman). This helps confirm some of the studies regarding trump supporters and their proclivity to believing and sharing fake news. Meanwhile the results of the real media outlet engagement shows that “the 20 best-performing election stories from 19 major news websites generated a total of 7,367,000 shares, reactions, and comments on Facebook” (Silverman). The study proved the power and impact that fake news has on social media users. This is especially evident to the pews research that people are getting their news from social media. Over “62% – get news on social media” (Gottfried and Shearer). This study also ties into the effect that partisan politics has on media and information consumption. By targeting specific political ideologies, fake news stories are able to generate high levels of traffic and engagement on social media. One example of this would be from one of the Macedonia sites that BuzzFeed identified in one of their investigations. One of the stories from that site “falsely claimed that Clinton was about to be indicted. It received 149,000 engagements on Facebook” (Silverman). The lesson that should be taken away from this would be to understand the power and influence that partisan echo chambers can have. Especially on a social media platform like Facebook.

Understanding how and why fake news is so easily spread is an important factor in helping identify and stopping these sites and information. Fake news relies heavily on personal beliefs, partisan loyalty, and fear. Fake news is very similar to propaganda in this way. Especially when political administrations like the Trump Administrations utilize alternative facts and fake news stories to justify policy and political actions. It’s through this usage that can have

dangerous implications. This is why learning how to combat fake news is so important, which is what the next chapter will be about.

Property of John Mitchell Price

Ch.5: Ways To Combat Fake News

Understanding the influence and usage of Fake News can be an instrumental tool in fighting it. However, in order to fight a threat, it's important to have an arsenal of weapons and skills at disposal. These methods and organizations can help aide in fighting the threat of fake news and misinformation. However, fighting fake news isn't an easy endeavor. Understanding the complexities and background of the misinformation industry is an important tool against fake news. However, it is not enough to stop its spread and wide reach. Fortunately, this chapter will detail other solutions to the fake news menace. This chapter will detail some of the important skills and programs that can be beneficial to fighting fake news. The tools and programs listed in this chapter rely on critical thinking, education, strong research skills, and a strong sense of urgency. Thankfully, educational programs and companies are some of the best ways to combat fake news and through their help, the spread of these fake news sources will diminish.

One of the easiest ways to check whether a news story or website is fake is through fact checking websites. Some of the websites would be Snopes, Politico, and Factcheck.org. The importance of these websites in fighting fake news and misinformation is large. The websites are easy to use and have a very large collection of information and sources. Fact checking is key to journalism and in the post-truth age, they're more crucial than ever. However, people are more inclined to believe in platforms that cater to their partisan beliefs. This can distort opinions and viewpoints, especially since some fact-checking sites are manually worked on and done. Which begs the question, what's another tool that's great for detecting fake news, bias, and media messages? Media Literacy is the answer to that question.

One of the most important tools in combating fake news and misinformation in the media

would be Media Literacy. Media Literacy, as defined by Dr. Art Silverblatt, “is a critical thinking skill that enables people to make independent choices with regard to (1) which media programming to select and (2) how to interpret the information they receive through the channels of mass communications” (Silverblatt XV). In short, media literacy understanding the messages and information that is presented to us. It’s questioning the information that is shown to us and then proceeding to understand its influence on society. It’s understanding all forms of media and how they can contain messages within them. Through this understanding, media literate individuals will be able to craft their own messages or even teach it to younger generations. Media has a massive influence on society. Media shapes worldviews and lifestyles. It also has both positive and negative influences on society. In this way, media can make individuals more aware of what’s happening around the world, or it can even twist perspectives of truth.

Silverblatt illustrates the neutrality of media by saying that it’s “neither good nor evil”

(Silverblatt). Media is neutral, and only through the hands of its users may it find ways to be either positive or negative. To illustrate an example, media is like fire. It can simultaneously be used to provide safety, warmth, protection, and as a tool for consumption. However, it can also

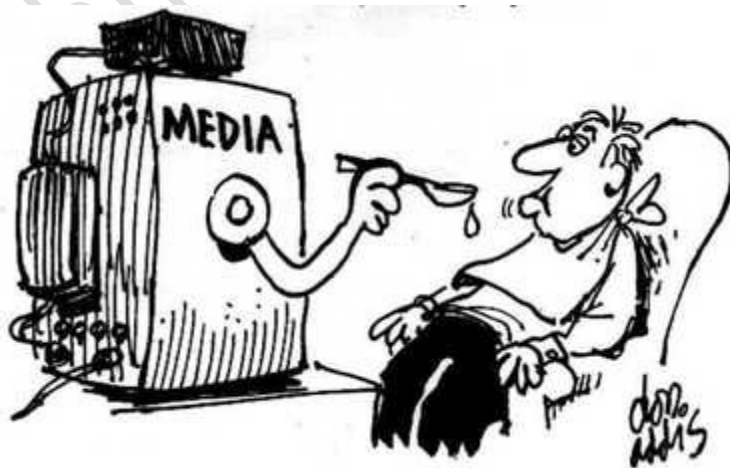


Figure 20: Illustration depicting media consumption.
Taken from: www.eladolinski.weebly.com

be used for destruction and violence. That’s the duality of media and through media literacy we can gain a better understanding the influence it has on society. By understanding media literacy and the influence media has, we can identify negative issues in the media landscape. Through

this understanding of both, fake news can be fought and identified more easily. However, only through learning media literacy skills can this be achievable. Media Literacy education can be instrumental to fighting fake news and information because it requires critical thinking skills, skepticism, and research and analytical skills. All of which are incredibly important in identifying fake news.

Media literacy is a complex subject with various principles, terms, and concepts. In order to fully understand media literacy and its educational properties, it's important to understand all of its concepts. The first of these concepts would be understanding the difference between manifest and latent messages. Silverblatt describes manifest messages as being 'direct and clear to the audiences' (Silverblatt xvii). This means that the messages are clear, concise and easy to recognize. They're easily identifiable to an average audience as they manifest themselves clearly. Meanwhile latent messages are "indirect, and beneath the surface, and consequently, escape our immediate attention" (Silverblatt xvii). This means that latent messages are subtle, more complex, and require additional research and observation to find and understand. Understanding the difference between these two messages is crucial for media literate students. Messages have meaning and it's important to understand the theme behind them. Understanding what a story's purpose and meaning is crucial to identifying whether it is harmful or not.

The next concept of media literacy are cumulative messages. Silverblatt describes cumulative messages as messages that "occur with such frequency over time that they form new meanings, independent of any individual production" (Silverblatt xvii). Its messages that are so consistent in the media that they create aggregate and stereotypical images and ideals in society.

The other concept, which is one of the more important ones to learn, would be point of view. Point of views in media often refer to an opinion and a perspective on certain events.

Silverblatt reveals that there are ranges in points of view. They are “the media communicator, characters in the presentation, the prevailing point of view of the period in which it was produced, and the point of view of audience members” (Silverblatt xvii). It’s important to understand point of view in media productions for several reasons. The first reason is that point of views have an impact on how stories are told and made. A perspective and even a bias can shape the structure of a story therefore it’s important to understand those who are making it and what their beliefs and motivations are. The second and third reasons would be that point of view can alter what kind of information is being told and how audiences react. This is important because bias and opinion can directly shape how information and stories are told and shared. Having a political bias while crafting a story can have ramifications. The survey conducted by Pew research is proof enough that political bias is already registered in viewers and can directly impact how they view it. It’s through media literacy that we can identify this bias and share how it’s done to others. Through media literacy we can educate others on how to spot biased messages and media and how to correctly interpret their meanings and goals.

The fourth concept would be understanding that media are constructions of reality. This means that media has the ability to “instantaneously preserve a moment of time in space, a media image creates the illusion of verisimilitude, or lifelike quality” (Silverblatt xviii). This means that media production and stories can show content that illustrates real events and issues. This creates relatability and resonance on the story or content with the viewers. However, through media literacy, we can understand that sometimes these images or stories can be taken out of context in the large scheme of things. With this knowledge in hand, media literate individuals know that media can capture an event, and display it without context. This can create a completely new meaning, which is how many fake news and politically biased journalists work. People act

differently when they realize they are under a camera, so it's important to keep the construct of reality at hand when reviewing misinformation and fake news. This way you can help surmise if an event, story, and even photo is staged, faked, or real.

The fifth concept would be understanding different affective strategies involved in media productions. These strategies in media production would involve creating emotional responses. "Production elements such as color, shape, lightening, and size convey meaning by evoking emotional responses in the audience" (Silverblatt xviii). It's creating emotional resonance with the audience that compels them to keep watching or reading. Clickbait and political bias can be affective responses as well because they create resonance with viewers, which draws them in. For example, a sensationalist headline with an intentionally placed controversial picture of an individual will be more likely to garner attention than an article with a normal headline and front image.

The last core concept of media literacy education would be understanding embedded values. These values may "reflect the value system of the media communicator, as well as widely held cultural; values and attitudes that, in turn, reinforce and shape attitudes and values among members of the audience" (Silverblatt xviii). Understanding the values of both the audiences and the communicators is an integral part of media literacy and research. Understanding the worldviews of others will lead to an understanding of what they do and what values communicators are wanting to push and promote. By identifying the embedded values of communicators, we understand the purpose of their messages, their system, and then the validity of their content.

It's important to note that media literacy isn't a new concept. Media literacy has been taught in school since the 1980s. Because of this importance, a Californian Senator by the name

of Bill Dodd is pushing a bill catered to media literacy education. “Senate Bill 135 is a proposed bill looking to add pupil instruction for media literacy in school curriculums” (Ball). Senate Bill 135’s purpose is to teach media literacy in schools so that students will learn how to spot and fight fake news. This bill stems from Dodds fear of the influence that the internet has on students. He’s quoted as saying “While information has become more accessible than ever, many lack the tools to identify fake or misleading news and information. By giving students the proper tools to analyze the media they consume, we can empower them to make informed decisions” (Ball). This bill has been met with numerous online praise and many within the state of California are hoping that the bill will be passed. This is important because the skills that media literacy offers are instrumental to fighting misinformation. By having a whole state include media literacy in it’s curriculum could be devastating to fake news organizations and websites. The importance of spreading media literacy awareness is vital to combating the effects that fake news and digital media could have on younger generations.

Now with these core concepts in mind, one can easily understand the influence that media can have on a society. You can take these concepts and apply them to almost every medium in the media landscape. These become tools to help understand the world that media influences. One of these tools that springs from media literacy would be news literacy. News literacy, as defined by Art Silverblatt, is “a discipline that focuses on the application of media literacy principles and strategies to the discipline of journalism” (Silverblat 285). It’s using the information learned from media literacy studies and applying it to news consumption and journalism. In regards to misinformation and fake news in the media, news literacy could be one the strongest tolls to fight them. This is especially important in the advent of the digital and post-truth age that many consider we are living in now. This advent of misinformation in the media

has pushed for a stronger emphasis on teaching news literacy. The effects of this push would create the News Literacy Project. This is an educational program that was created in 2008 in “Stony Brook University’s School of Journalism” (Silverblatt 285). It’s through this program that Stony Brook University wishes to instill a stronger sense of critical thinking, media literacy, and proper news creation and navigation from its students. Their push for stronger media literacy skills is heavily laid out in its mission statement: “The projects primary aim is to teach students the critical thinking skills they need to be smarter and more frequent consumers and creators of credible information across all media and platforms” (Silverblatt 285).

The push for stronger news literacy in the world has been greatly received and even picked up by different organizations. One of these companies that is adopting the importance of news literacy would be Facebook. Facebook has just recently launched a high profile collaborative project on using news literacy to fight fake news. This project is called the News Integrity Initiative, and it’s “a \$14m collaborative project to advance the public’s news literacy” (Murgia). This project was in response to the criticism about its help in the rise of fake news on it’s website. The project’s goal, as stated by Facebook, “is to help the public make informed judgments about the news they read and share online. The fund will spur applied research and projects, and convene meetings with industry experts” (Murgia). This will also be an opportunity to help publishers and writers reach bigger audiences and have their works on the influence of fake news and media literacy. It’s a project with the goal of teaching the importance of media and news literacy to a larger audience.

Now that both of these concepts are explained, it’s important to detail the need for their involvement in not just fighting fake news, but also for education of future generations. Two recent studies conducted by Stanford University and Pew Research illustrate the need for media

literacy. The first study, which was conducted professors at Stanford University, was about how well their students are able to judge the credibility of online sources. The results of the study revealed that their students had a hard time “distinguishing advertisements from news articles or identifying where information came from” (Donald). The study was organized through several assessments and questions. “The assessments were administered to students across 12 states. In total, the researchers collected and analyzed 7,804 student responses.” (Donald). The assessments were catered towards understanding student’s ability to correctly understand different fake news sites and information. Students were asked to what news literacy meant, how they can spot political bias, and by evaluating their skills in deducting where information was true or not. One of these assessments was asking students to analyze two Facebook posts about Donald Trump announcing his candidacy for president. One was from a verified Fox News account (that had a blue checkmark to illustrate its validity) and the other was from false account that looked like Fox News but had a different logo. Unfortunately, “only a quarter of the students recognized and explained the significance of the blue checkmark. And over 30 percent of students argued that the fake account was more trustworthy because of some key graphic elements that it included” (Donald). Sam Wineburg, The professor in charge of this study, has expressed his concerns over the results of the study. However, it’s the results of this study that has inspired him to push media and news literacy to teachers all over the country. He hopes to create a curriculum to give to teachers that details the important of media and digital literacy. One aspect of this curriculum would be that he and his fellow researchers would be able to “produce videos showing the depth of the problem and demonstrating the link between digital literacy and informed citizenship” (Donald).

The second study would be the survey conducted by Pew Research on social media usage

that was explained earlier. The study revealed that “62% – get news on social media, and 18% do so often” (Gottfried and Shearer). The issue that this survey reveals is that people are getting their information from a social that isn’t meant to be a news provider or news aggregate, especially since that Facebook is the most popular site that users get their news and information on. This study can be combined with the previous one due to the amount of younger generations using social media and getting their news from it. The study revealed that (explain more on why this is an issue)

This is where both media and news literacy can come to play. Media and news literacy isn’t just about helping student learn how to become critical and literate users of media. It’s about helping them become more competent users of critical thinking and literacy so they can control their interpretations of what they see and read instead the interpretations and forced bias controlling them. Media literate individuals are able to question the information and sources in front of them. An example of this would be that media literate individuals learn to methodically acquire and compile information amongst several different news and media sites. Sites could be more formal news source like BBC, NPR, and The New York Times and even informal like tweets, blog posts, and Facebook posts. It’s important to do this because by adhering to one news site then the reader isn’t getting the whole breadth of the story. This is why media literate individuals will acquire information from a variety of sources. The large the source accumulation, the more knowledgeable about the subject one becomes. This also goes in hand with questioning the validity of the story and information that’s being presented from sources. Media Literate individuals question the validity of information from any of these sources and do not privilege one over the other. Information presented on a formal TV news source, such as CNN or Fox News, for instance, may be just as inaccurate as someone's blog post. This involves

understanding all sources of information. This can mean checking for political bias and accuracy in reporting. Media literates learn this through observation and analysis. Most people, as per the study from the survey, are less inclined to research more into stories and news that goes against worldviews. People are then more inclined to fact check the sources that they don't agree with. They'll be more agreeable and loyal to a news that affirms their beliefs and sentiments but strike

out to others that contradict it. Media literate individuals should not be able to do this because understanding the whole breadth of diversity of news media is important. Again, this reaffirms the stance that more news sources means a more informed individual. Media literates are less able to be swayed by worldview and political bias than others. This is crucial in fighting fake news because it relies heavily on emotional and political bias. Media literate individuals also learn to distinguish the difference between formal and informal sources of information. This can help create a distinction between professional or non-professional. Media Literacy helps individuals learn how to examine packaged

content and how to understand if it's valid or not. Through this they can learn to recognize

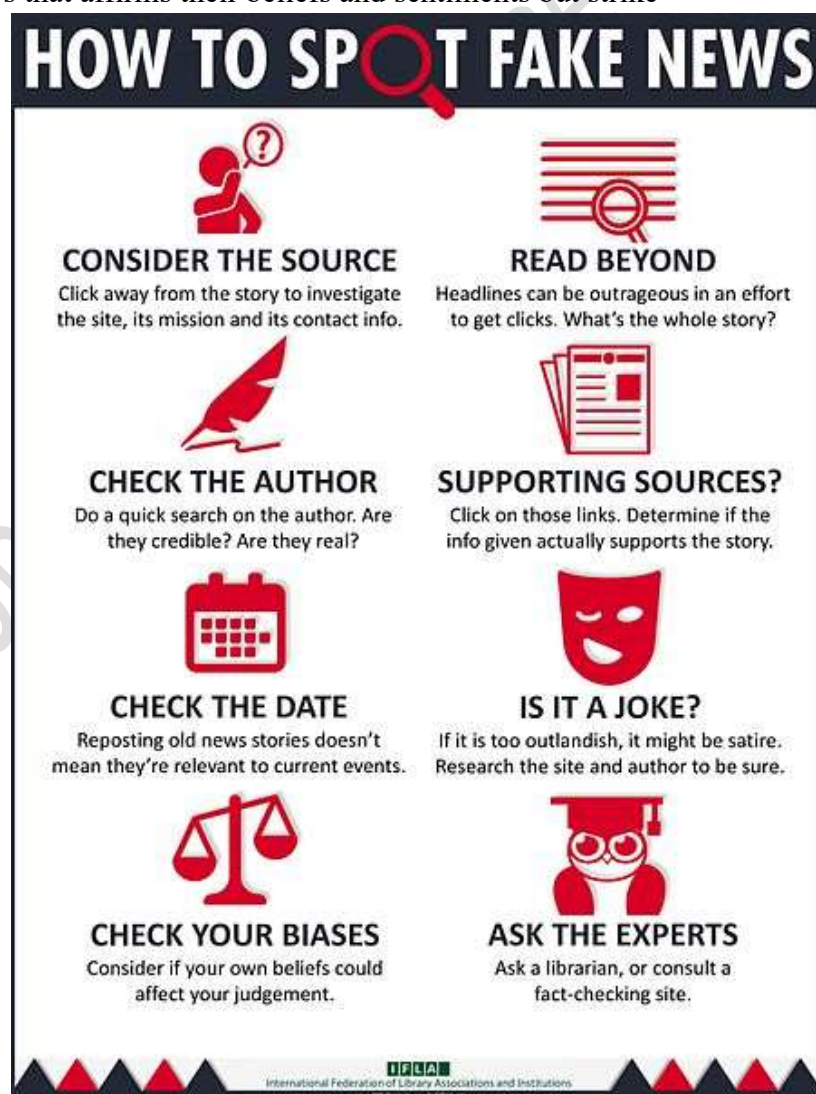


Figure 21: IFLA's chart on how to spot fake news.
Taken from: www.ifla.org

whether any news or information site is bias, faked, or real.

In league with using the importance of media and news literacy NPR published a story on how to effectively spot fake news using research methods taught in both subjects. Much of the information ties in with media and news literacy. This article goes in depth on ways to spot and identify fake news. The first guideline in the article deals with paying attention to the website's URL address and domain. This is important because most "established news organizations usually own their domains and they have a standard look that you are probably familiar with. Sites with such endings like .com.co" (Davis). The reason why these websites do this is to have as close of a copy to the original website as they can. Many of these fake news websites try to resemble high profile news networks to fool visitors into thinking they are the legitimate news source. This way they can fool readers and unsuspecting viewers into the website through social media platforms. These websites rely on people not using critical thinking or perception skills. Therefore people who don't pay close enough attention to the layout or the URL address will be more likely to fall into the trap thinking that the fake website is the real one.

The second guideline would be doing a background search on the website or organization. In order to do this, you should check out the website's posting history, staff, writers, and even mission statement. NPR explains that if the mission statement is "melodramatic and seems overblown, you should be skeptical" (Davis). This is an indicator for a fake news site because most news organization's mission statements will be objective, professional, and devoid of any personal belief. They'll also be more concerned about reporting the news instead of overdramatizing the event.

NPR's third and fourth factors into seeing if an article is fake news go together. They both are about looking at quotes made in the story and who made them. These two guidelines

stress the importance of using cross-referencing and research. If it is a very important story, then there should be other news networks and sites talking about the issue, with professionals and academics discussing the story. If the news story is devoid of any professional or academic scholar with information on the story, it's a good chance that it is a fake piece. This can also go in tandem with fake news stories taking information from an interview out of context and blowing it out of proportion. An example the article gives would be "President Obama said he wanted to take everyone's guns away" (Davis). This is important because there will be quotes. Obama is a public official who will have everything he says publicly recorded and archived. It's important to use this information as research to see if he really wanted to take guns away. Fake news sites use these methods as a tool of political bias in an effort to get more readers and viewers to their content. Using quote and informational research is a great offensive tool to shed light on misinformation like this. This emphasis on research and cross-referencing information is also parallel with fake news stories and major news networks. In many cases fake news stories won't be showing up on major news networks. Therefore it's important to cross-reference a story you read on a suspicious news site with a major news network. If major news networks like BBC, CNN, FOX, and New York Times aren't reporting or discussing the story you read, then it's most likely fake.

The fifth guideline that NPR gives in the article is reading through the comments on an article. This is an important rule because many comments on articles can give insight into whether a story is fake or not. NPR states this because "A lot of these fake and misleading stories are shared on social media platforms" (Davis). Therefore, it's imperative that individuals read the comments on these posts to decide whether or not the community thinks it's fake. If the majority of comments are decrying its falsehood, then it could be fake. However, mod mentality

can be a dangerous mindset because it could be influenced by political and personal bias. With this in mind, you should still read the comments and the story, and then cross-reference the information from the story with other major news networks.

The sixth and final guideline in the article is reverse searching images shown in news articles. Images can be taken out of context and even distorted and in order to emphasize the context of a story. NPR's explanation for reverse searching images is that "if people who write these fake news stories don't even leave their homes or interview anyone for the stories, it's unlikely they take their own pictures" (Davis). Therefore, the article explains that searching the image on Google can reveal the true source from where it came from and the context that was taken out of it. It's detective work that can go a long way, especially with images. Images and clickbait headlines are a major source of ways that fake news articles are seen and shared. Using this particular piece of information can help deliver the falsified information from the real one.

The information compiled in this chapter is instrumental to fighting the spread of fake news and misinformation. The information provided are tools, tools that be combined and utilized to fix problems that fake news has caused. Out of all of these tools, Media literacy can be considered the strongest. The ability question the information provide can be incredibly useful when being presented with information that can be deemed has fake, hazardous, or even propaganda. Media literacy is a gateway that gives it's practitioners the ability to understand the influence that media has on society. Through this information, media literate individuals can help change and shape the way we understand and use media. By doing so, the influence that fake

news and misinformation can be greatly diminished. It's through the practices and teachings of media literacy that companies like Facebook, Google, and NPR are able to fight and combat fake news. Therefore it's important that media literacy is taught in schools so that individuals can read the information they receive from the media without it having a negative impact on their lives and others.

The first company that is fighting fake news would be Facebook. Throughout the election Facebook has received a lot of negative publicity for its lack of action against the rise of fake news sites. Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, was even on record for saying that "I think the idea that fake news on Facebook — of which it's a small amount of content — influenced the election in any way is a pretty crazy idea" (Crook). He believed that Facebook's

issue with fake news, which he thought of as a little problem, had no impact on the country or the election. Several media companies expressed their displeasure with Zuckerberg's comments. It was

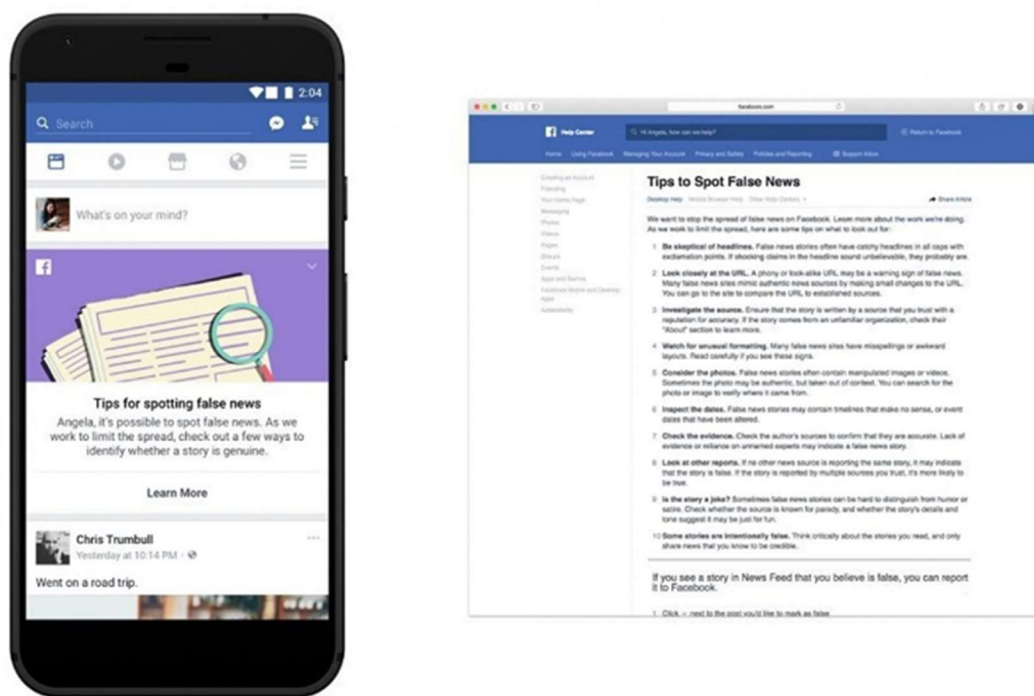


Figure 22: Example of what Facebook's fact checking guidelines are with their new anti-fake news network.

Taken from: www.washingtonpost.com

considered an erroneous comment particularly because Facebook has become a major source

where people get their news. The fact that “six in 10 Americans get their news from social media” (Dreyfuss).

However, recently Zuckerberg has decided to help aid in the fight against misinformation and fake news. In December of 2016, Facebook revealed publically that it will partner with the Poynter International Fact-Checking Network to create a program to fight fake news. . This network would include respected organizations like “such as Snopes and the Associated Press, to evaluate articles flagged by Facebook users” (Tsukayama). Essentially what this partnership will do is to evaluate these flagged articles and accounts evaluated by Facebook’s partners. These fact checkers will then evaluate and test the articles for truth and accuracy. If they fail the evaluation then Facebook will label their failed evaluation on their accounts and posts. This way people who scroll down on their news feed and see these fake articles will know they’ve been debunked and will move on. There will also be alerts to users if they want to share an article from an account that’s been labeled as fake. Users will also have an opportunity to contribute as well by being able to report these accounts and post directly to Facebook as well as messaging the person responsible for the fake article. Another thing to note is that Facebook will not have a blacklist site of fake news websites. However, they have “built a sort of data profile of characteristics that fake-news articles share — such as low share numbers after the headline is clicked — which it will use to decide when to have something fact-checked” (Tsukayama). This all will eventually accumulated into a massive information pile through extensive analysis on user reports and flagging, and characteristic of the fake accounts. Through this program, Facebook will be trying to lessen the influence of misinformation and fake news on its site and minimize the impact it has on its users. They are also hunting down business that make profit from fake news. They’re doing this by targeting ads from any account or business that has had an article or post that has

failed its evaluation. “Any article that has been disputed, for example, cannot be used in an ad”

(Tsukayama). The reasoning for this change was stated by Adam Mosseri, who is Facebook’s VP of Product Development. He states that “We have a responsibility to reduce the spread of fake news on our platform,” (Tsukayama).

In an effort to prove their commitment to fighting the spread of fake news, Facebook has been running ad campaigns on print newspaper.

These newspapers have been on French and German newspapers like

“Le Monde, L’Express, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Der Spiegel and Bild” (Tsukayama). The ads in the paper detailed ways that readers and users could identify and then report fake news sites and accounts. The reason for this was because of the French national elections which have been a prime target for fake news as well. In an effort to not repeat the problems with the US election, Facebook offered to throw its hat into the ring and try to fight misinformation. The success of this campaign proved fruitful as Facebook revealed that they had managed to closed “30,000 false accounts in France” (Tsukayama).

Another company that has started to combat fake news would be Google. During the election, Google was criticized for dismissing their ability to accurately combat fake news.

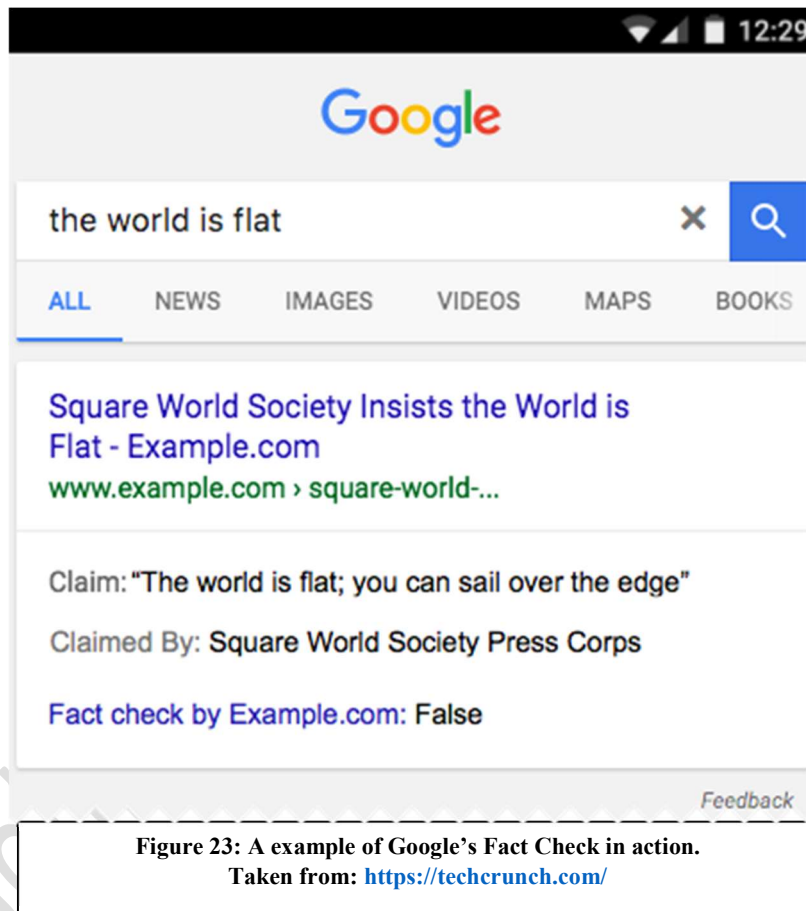


Figure 23: A example of Google’s Fact Check in action.
Taken from: <https://techcrunch.com/>

“Google's excuse was that so much content is uploaded online that it's impossible to weed out every offender.” (Kovach). Many claim that Google had a hand in the election due to the vast amounts of fake news that appeared in their searches. One infamous story that appeared in Google searches was a fake news story that claimed “former President Barack Obama was planning a coup” (Riotta). After seeing the influence fake news had, they’ve decided to focus more attention towards combatting it. Google has released a new tool called Fact Check to aid in fighting fake news. This tool works when users turn it on. Then when doing a search, news stories will have fact checking tabs. This tool will be available for both Google news and search however, Google is not the one doing the fact -checking. It will “instead will surface results from the likes of PolitiFact and Snopes” (Kharpal). One caveat of the whole tool is that this information won’t be available for every search. Google claims that “there may be search result pages where different publishers checked the same claim and reached different conclusions” (Kosslyn and Yu). This is because the fact checking isn’t Google’s job but also for an education reason. Google claims that they think it’s important for people to learn and understand different opinions and sources. Regardless of the caveats, they think the tool will be influential in fighting fake news and Google believes that “people will have an easier time reviewing and assessing these fact checks, and making their own informed opinions” (Kosslyn and Yu).

The importance that both Facebook and Google are fighting fake news cannot be understated. Both have become a major source of news for many. Insert source on how many. Because of this large demographic, both companies have a responsibility to ensure that its users are seeing real news. News that is contained facts and sources, and not lies, hoaxes, and misinformation. These companies are ensuring that they recognize the threat that fake news

poses. Through their efforts, the public will hopefully gain a better understanding of how to combat and fight fake news.

Ch.6: Conclusion And Ruminations

Fake news has been utilized through various cycles of history. Its adaptability and influence can be easily manipulated and used to create disorder, chaos, and harm towards its targeted audience. However, what's important about understanding fake news in the modern era is the advancement of the internet. The world is catching up to the internet as so many people are connected through smart phones and computers. So many people are receiving their information now from websites, blogs, and social media platforms. This is important because so many people are being plugged into the internet, the information they are receiving isn't all filtered or fact checked. The internet makes information so readily available and accessible that it could create laziness in research and accountability. The internet is making news and information gathering in the modern age more difficult for audiences, especially digital native's thanks in part to the research conducted by the pew research center. Younger generations are more susceptible to fake news and that because of the vast amount of information that they are receiving from internet and the lack of proper education to help them filter fake and harmful information from the real and valid stories and sources. Fake news in the digital age is harder to source and to spot thanks to the various platforms of digital media and the veil of anonymity of writers and online posters. These posters and platforms play into the emotions, education, and partisanship of digital users and navigators. These factors make people much more susceptible to fake news. It's through

these factors that allows fake news to flourish in this digital age. Anyone can create fake news, which makes it a hydra. When one organization is identified as fake, others will be created in its wake.

However, despite its impact and its fascinating ability to spread, it can be beaten. Fake news may be very adaptable and manipulative, but even the strongest of concepts and problems can be beaten. Fake news is no exception to this thought and this is why the methods described in this case analysis. Education is one of the strongest skills one can have to combat misinformation. This is especially directed to the importance of media and news literacy. Internet and media users are being bombarded by countless messages daily. Many of these messages can be harmful and deceitful. Not only that but they can also contain corporate or partisan propaganda. People can get swept away in these messages therefore it's imperative that all generations learn media literacy skills. These skills can help curb this rise of fake news and misinformation by be inquisitive about the messages that are experiencing. The inquisitive and resource skills that media literacy imparts on its practitioners will allow individuals to reveal if a story and source are fake or real. This is important because democracies depend on an educated and involved populace to survive. Fake news doesn't benefit anyone, especially the write. It creates division which can lead to political and social turmoil. This why media literacy and the skills that it teaches is so important. Companies and fact checking organizations can do a lot of work in helping identify fake news. However, it will eventually depend on the individuals themselves to figure out the validity and reliability of questionable sources. It's important to question things you see and read, which is one of the core meanings of media literacy. It's through this belief that fake news can be beaten and its impact lessened. Fake news is a human issue, therefore it requires human interference to engage in halting its spread. The more informed

and unbiased people there are, the less fake news has an impact. Fake news does have an impact on our society. The digital media landscape is a hive for which these companies and organizations can flourish and profit. This is why learning how to combat it is vital not only to our media and political landscape, but for the progression of society.

It's important to note that we are living in an increasingly connected world. This world needs transparency, unity, trust, and responsibility in order to prevent the spread of fake news and the misinformation that comes with it. Understanding fake news is an important aspect of fighting. Knowing every intricacy about fake news can help with the identification of more fake news sites and stories. Modern fake news was created on the internet, and it's through its users that it can be beaten. This can be done through a variety of ways: research, media literacy, cooperation with others, fact checking sites and open dialog. The last one is incredibly important. Engage with the people who read and spread fake news. Be respectful to them, show them facts and data, and also understand their worldview. Understanding their worldview allows for the opportunity to see why they follow it. Beating fake news is a group effort, therefore it's important that communities band together to filter fake news and misinformation out. Unity trumps division, which is what fake news creates.

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