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Argumentative Research Paper

# Introduction

Honesty may still be the best policy. However, at present time and age, some definitely like it hoax. Fake news has been in existence ever since the 14th century, with people using it to attract readers and improve their chances of selling the papers. On the contrary, the former term has taken on a meaning of its own and has been a part of the regular circulation to such an extent that it was regarded as the term of the year by Oxford Dictionary in the year 2016. That is not all. By 2017, the usage of the term had increased by 365%, earning itself a spot, once again, in Collins Dictionary.

At present, courtesy of its use, the term fake news holds legitimacy for not being legitimate. As ironic as that sounds, it is the truth. The reason behind this well-known term has earned novelty at present is its integration in media. Media has always been one of the most powerful entities on the planet. They bring political, social and economic awareness to the masses and is responsible for showing us the truth and laying bare the harsh realities of life at the same time. Thus, it is accurately considered the fourth pillar of the state in a democratic society. Walter Lippmann, writing for The Atlantic in 1919, argued how propaganda created a problem for democracy (Sproule). He was of the belief that news is regarded as a source of public opinion in a democratic modern western society and it should be protected from the taint of propaganda. Unless it does so, no society can justifiably call itself free (Lippmann).

While the incorporation of social media in our lives and society as a news outlet has changed the normative news cycle and has made media more active, it has its very own set of vices. With social media, there is no 24-hour news cycle to work in to get the word to the masses. News outlets update news portals by the minute and people consume these updates like air. In spite of the importance, this minute based update holds, it gives fake news a window of legitimacy. This means, that those individuals that have a propaganda of their own can very easily integrate fake news right among the correct facts and figures. Funnily enough, these individuals do so in such an incredible manner that no one can separate the truth from fake news. This way, social media has not only been beneficial to the spread of the news cycle, but it has also been undermining its credibility. Disinformation and fake news have become symbols of various ills ailing society. They are regarded as the prime sources of manipulation of the public opinion and affect the real world in a number of ways (Gu et al.). It may be a historical phenomenon, the introduction of a new form of technology simply gives it new ways to spread like wildfire.

Incorrect information disguised as genuine facts has laid the basis of information pollution for many countries (Wardle and Derakhshan), along with manipulation of media (Marwick and Lewis) and information warfare (Khaldarova and Pantti), among other things. Not only is it damaging democracy, but it is also polluting the public sphere, giving rise to misinformation and radicalization of the masses. It also shapes people’s attitudes, which may not always be in favor of the state or those around them.

It is worth mentioning here that powerful actors, including politicians and bureaucrats, have been appropriating the media to comply with their demand and keep the news bits not favorable to them out of the news cycle. For instance, The US President Donald Trump has often seen criticizing news outlets such as the New York Times and CNN as portals of fake news. This is especially prevalent in countries where press freedom is restricted, such as Russia, China or Turkey to name a few. The politicians in the countries have taken to undermining the news outlets all to beat back the scrutiny of media (Erlanger).

For quite some time, people looked towards hard news to measure the political impact of mass media. However, in recent years entertainment-oriented programming has also become significant in this regard such as late-night talk shows and satirical news-programs. While late-night talk shows tend to see things in a humorous light, satirical news-programs are regarded as fake news (Holbert). They tend to have an effect on viewers attitudes, perception, salience, behaviors and have a politically significant outcome. Given the way how media works, it goes without saying how various modes of media influence one another (Holbert). The same goes for how multiple modes of media influence the political narrative and how it shapes the perspective of an individual. Just as easily as it can break a good-hearted individual down, it can be built a tyrant up, all through the use of a few soft words by someone people trust.

The influence fake news has can easily be judged by things like how a make-believe story about Pope Francis endorsing Donald Trump’s run for the US President tipped the scales in his favor to win the elections. The same is observed in the UK, where cyber troops are exclusively at work trying to create and upload videos that particularly featured persuasive content and messages, created solely to sway the public opinion towards their exclusive narrative. The power that fake news wields that completely be described in the fact that those that need their paper in circulation choose to create war hysteria and contain gory details regarding murders, sexual assaults, and other immortal behavior just to pique people’s interest to make a purchase may be worth criticizing. However, it cannot be denied that this tactic actually tends to work.

**Potential Causes of Promoting Fake News**

Identifying the creators giving rise to the phenomenon of fake news is a concern that ails the society to such an extent that it has become a feature for most academic articles and media reports. No one really knows is behind the initiation of a vicious cycle, but just about every influential actor like the government, companies, organizations and such have been held responsible in order to make money or propagate their personal views. While it has been suggested that understanding the reasons behind the fake news may help in understanding the motivation or intention it stems from, the core three factors identified so far are either political, financial or social (Wardle & Hossein, Warwick & Lewis).

**Political**

Fake news being circulated recently is seen to be dripping in political ideology or motivation (Woolley and Guilbeault). Political disinformation is often called propaganda, or strategic narratives, which are regarded as mediums for political actors to shape perceptions and actions (Miskimmon et al.). Using fake news, along with automated bot account and other means of manipulation tactics have played an important role in rigging the election in about 17 countries in the past year or so, including Philippines, Turkey, and Venezuela. Political disinformation efforts like these are typically used to sow mistrust and confusion about what sources of information are authentic, making people confused about what and whom to believe in. In the long run, it can diminish trust in central institutions, such as news media.

## Financial

Yellow journalism is often associated with the misconduct of newsgathering (Campbell). It can be described to explain the circulation war between the New York Journal by William Randolph Hearst and New York World by Joseph Pulitzer. Critics were accused by both papers for not only sensationalizing the news but also glamourizing morbid details like murders, sexual assaults, and immortality to increase the newspaper circulation (Campbell). One of the most infamous recent examples of fake news produced for financial gain involves the teenagers from a town in Veles, Macedonia, who churned out sensationalist stories about the American presidential candidates in 2016 to earn cash from advertising (Kirby; Subramanian). This was observed and confirmed by a number of platforms within the same election campaigns, where false and true stories are compared with one another. Additionally, these stories outperformed the real ones on Facebook, with most stories with explicitly in the favor of Trump while going against Clinton (Silverman).

# Solutions

Fake news and the news outlets are a match made in hell. There are sites that are made with the sole intention to click bait people into wild conspiracy theories and spread false beliefs among the general public. While most people are diligent enough to separate fake news and actual news and don’t believe most of the things they read on the internet, that doesn’t necessarily mean that there are folks that don’t. According to Statista, 21% of people in the United States believe that they believe ‘a lot’ of the fake news that goes around on the internet. And, this number is obviously extremely concerning. However, there are ways to recognize and even counter fake news.

The thing we, as a community, can do, is to start flagging any fake information that we find on the internet. If you were able to disprove of some piece of the news report, that doesn’t mean that others could do the same. So, it is now your ethical responsibility to prevent further propagation of that misinformation. For example, if you see some far-fetched news report on Facebook, just flag it so that the Facebook Team can review the contents of the post. Most of the time, news outlets and corporations are extremely careful about their medium being used as a way to distribute misinformation. Due to this reason, if an account gets flagged a certain number of times, there’s a high probability that the account will be removed for violation of terms and policies.

The second step is through creating algorithms that are able to filter false and true information. A good example of this is Wikipedia’s ClueBot NG which fights off vandalism and false news on the open-to-edits Wikipedia pages. While these algorithms work pretty well, all they do is cross-reference some information with reliable websites. However, this isn't the best way to check for false news since sometimes, even reliable news sources could be affected by disinformation. So, to counter this problem, companies are implementing AI into their algorithms that are fed thousands of fake articles. This repository helps them identify common characteristics of fake news posts and then cross-reference them with the unknown sourced report.

The third initiative to take is to start teaching naïve minds on how they can pick up on fake and real news. Schools have started implementing on this initiative and there are already hundreds of campaigns in the process to help kids (the age group that is the most affected by fake news) understand the difference between fake and real news. But, the best way to educate yourself and the people around you is to completely stop taking everything you hear at face value. Sure, there are outlets like Forbes or HuffPost that are 100% reliable. These news sources conduct thorough research before they post anything. But, other sources that are just looking for likes and views should never be believed – Even if they’re claiming that the sky is blue.

# Conclusion

The concerns over fake news are plenty and are borne out of necessity. With various types of manipulations in place, which are studied within political communication, marketing, warfare, and information technology. The concerns of the masses regarding the spread of fake news are rather vital and should be given its due consideration, one of its biggest vices is the toll it takes on the perception of an individual and the masses as a whole. In today’s world, people would rather believe a glamourized lie than a plain truth. Thus, as key as it is to keep them engaged in the truth, it is just as important for the people to keep an open mind. They should not believe everything they come across, because news portals are one thing that shouldn’t do away with the benefit of the doubt. They are aware of the power they hold and they should be held accountable for misusing it.

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