Fake News

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Abstract

The main focus of this paper is to highlight the negative effects that fake news has in our media world today. Most, if not all, people have come across, or even spread fake news themselves at some point in their lives. This misinformation sabotages the authenticity of our world. I chose this topic because fake news is becoming increasingly popular in mainstream media, as well as social media. It causes people to believe stories that aren't true, and also deny those that are. While conducting my research, I explored all the negative effects of fake news and I narrowed my findings down to the most important things. As I concluded, fake news eradicates the reliability of media, polarizes political sides, and overflows the world internet with false information. Fake news is deceiving to a large majority of the population and in many countries around the world. Not only does fake news have various negative aspects, but it also has negative *global* aspects.

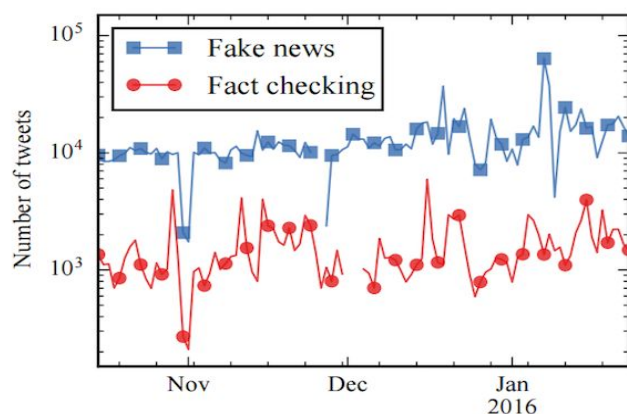*Keywords:* Fake news, social media, negative effects, politics, bias, propaganda

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A seventeen year old girl is scrolling through Twitter and reads, "On October 17, 2017, at age 95, Betty White is found dead in her home." Her immediate gut reaction is to believe it. Thoughts are flowing through her head, causing her to think, "Well she's old, of course she died." The same thing happened to me, but a little while back. After having confidence that the tweet was real, I later found out that Betty White was indeed, still alive, and that I had become a victim of this thing called "fake news." Fake news is news that is reported via television, newspaper, internet, or social media that is fictitious, or in other words, untrue. It is everywhere and only progressing. Some of the negative effects include destroying transparency, increasing the political gap, and consistently being spread around the globe.

Fake news annihilates transparency. Propaganda and made-up news stories are being spread daily. These unreliable sources have taken away from everything people believe to be true. "Many of the early, optimistic assumptions about how the internet would create a public sphere with greater openness, transparency and accuracy have been battered by how it has actually been used and abused" (Lillington, 2017, Para. 1). The internet is going corrupt because of those who think it's fun or necessary to spread fake news. According to a professor at the University of Maryland, "Fake news stories, the spread of propaganda, secret sponsors behind what we see and read, and hashtag flooding has damaged utopian ideas about the public benefits of the internet" (Lillington, 2017, Para. 1). This illustrates the fact that false news is indeed prevalent in today's society and it has defaced our thoughts of what media was originally used for: to inform. Media is not supposed to be a free for all, but in our society today, that is how it is being utilized.

The internet provides an open platform for everyone, which allows for unmonitored material to be exposed. A study claims that over 60% of adults that read news on social media are consuming and distributing more fake news stories than the most popular mainstream stories (Rosenbaum, 2017). Moreover, people should be extremely vigilant when consuming what could be fake news; it can destroy humanity on the internet. It is necessary to discover whether the news is sponsored material or organic material; therefore, individuals must be attentive and question everything they read, see, or hear. Besides the lack of authenticity on the internet, fake news also expands the gap between political sides.

Being misinformed about news can cause a large separation in the political spectrum. This is because a good majority of fake news has to do with politics, especially during this past year's presidential election. For example, the "pizzagate" conspiracy, where people believed that Clinton was running a child-abuse ring in the back of a pizza restaurant, sounds absolutely ridiculous; however, there is worry when it comes to floating or uneducated voters (Lillington, 2017). These voters fall under those who are susceptible to fake news because they will either believe everything they see or not even vote at all. People use dark ads in order to manipulate these voters (Lillington, 2017).

Figure one: This graph shows the number of tweets on the y-axis during the months of November-January 2016, which are along the x-axis. The blue line indicates the amount of fake news on Twitter, while the red line demonstrates the amount of facts checked.

This figure illustrates the spread of fake news during the 2016 presidential election. The amount of fake news was high throughout these few months, while showing a significant increase during the month of January. Due to the presidential inauguration taking place, there was a broad emergence of fake news.

Simultaneously, there is a great deal of bias in our media world. According to the Pew Research Center, liberal bias among national press has gone up twenty-two percent since 1995 (Wemple, 2017, Para. 4). This favoritism is a substantial portion of where fake news first originated. Much of the news that we come across today is directed solely at Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton because it is easier to spread untrue information about candidates when there are people to believe it. In addition to increasing the political gap, fake news is prevalent throughout the entire world and is significantly hard to moderate.

Toxic information is being spread like a wildfire. This fake news "epidemic" migrated through most countries involved with the internet and social media, and it needs to be left behind. It is said that public professionals believe that the internet is filled with anger and hate (Rosenbaum, 2017). It's unfortunate because in this day and age, there is a lot going on around the world and we need to be spreading love instead of hate. It's truly disgusting to see websites such as Redditt being viewed so often by the people of this world. This fake news platform is observed by 542 monthly visitors and is named as the eighth most visited website in the world (Rosenbaum, 2017).

While researching, I found that there are solutions like labeling and monitoring sites, as well as being personally active when reading fake news. In relation to this, a source claimed, "Compare what French, Arabic, U.S., and Canadian news are reporting on sensitive topics, such

as terrorism. Read between the lines" (Fahmy, 2017, Para. 20). Because each one is different, this is an effective way to find out if a country is spreading fake news.

Oppositely, some may think that fake news is actually a positive thing. Those are the ones who are producing and distributing false information left and right. These people may include reporters, writers, editors, anchors, journalists, ultra rightists or leftists, famous people, or even the average social media user. Everyone who spreads fake news has a purpose. The purpose of most is to make a point, get others to agree with their opinions, or even just to get likes or favorites. Others might not even realize what they are doing, or feel like it's easier to believe in the first thing they see, read, or hear. "...Satire has proven a potent force for attracting audiences to fake news TV programs" (Holton, 2011, Para. 1). This quote means that when humor is used, there is a higher temptation for people to believe it. I find this extremely disturbing. Although fake news is becoming more popular, it still makes the world a more miserable place.

Ultimately, this information is liquidating the clarity of media, fueling the hate between political sides, and being uncontrollably spread throughout the world. Mainstream media nowadays is desperate for clicks, and they will do anything to get an individual to submit to their views. Social media is being carelessly flooded daily. Falsified information is a real nuisance, to say the least. It can force one into believing things that are not true; therefore, I challenge each and every one of you to take a stand against this horrible epidemic we call "fake news."

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