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Fake News

Tracing the Genesis of a New Term and Old Practices

Abstract: Fake news has recently emerged as a buzzword in media and political discourses. Many incidences ranging from ethnic violence, inter-racial and religious conflicts to mass riots have been blamed on the spread of fake news. This chapter provides a clear historicization of the phenomenon of fake news, from its early days as far back as can be documented up to present day. Here we advance the argument that fake news is not a new phenomenon, but a part of human lives since societies were formed and information was shared. We further argue that the technological changes of the past century and recent decades, along with the expansion of communication spaces, have simply accelerated the speed at which fake news can be shared, as well as increased the spaces and platforms in which fake news may be found and spread.

Keywords: disinformation, history, fake news, strategic communications, propaganda

While it is clear that fake news has existed since humans began communicating and sharing information, fake news as a term is not the most useful when it comes to the myriad categories of false information as there are marked differences between types of inaccurate or misleading stories. For the purposes of this chapter, we can differentiate between disinformation (lies, hoaxes, stories, and images deliberately created and disseminated to influence or cause harm) and misinformation (mistakes, accidental sharing of false or misleading information, not intended to cause harm). The two should be understood as part of the "fake news ecosystem" and the "information disorder" currently afflicting the world. In this chapter, we treat them as such. The origins of each term stem from a particular place in history. Disinformation is commonly associated with the Russian term "dezinformaciya" and was defined in 1952 as "dissemination of false reports intended to mislead public opinion" (Taylor 2016). These, often government-sponsored, campaigns differ from propaganda (originally a positive term for the work of foreign Catholic missions to propagate the faith, taking the newer, more pejorative, definition connotations after World War I) (Diggs-Brown 2012, 48). Propaganda, as referred to in this chapter, denotes the systematic propagation of information or ideas by an interested party, specifically, in a tendentious way, in order to encourage or instill a certain attitude or response

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(OED 1989). There is a thin line separating propaganda and disinformation. This is because propaganda utilizes disinformation and vice versa. The thin difference, however, is that propaganda is information that advances only one side of an argument, while disinformation may advance both or all sides of an argument with a view to cause rifts in society and exploit them further for distraction or political gain.

This chapter is organized as follows: the first section provides a genesis of fake news by tracing its growth from 44 BCE, in the ancient Egyptian and Roman societies. This section outlines fake news up to the invention of the Guttenberg press, citing major incidences recorded as manifestations of fake news in historical texts. The second section, Fake News in the Modern Age, discusses the growth of fake news in the modern era, from the 1800s up to the end of World War II. The third section, Fake News in the New Information Age, explores disinformation in the new information age, from 1945 to 1995, while the final section, Fake News in the Digital Media Age, explores developments from 1995 to the present day.

1 The Genesis of Fake News (44 BCE–1799 CE)

To clearly trace the evolution of this information space prior to the digital age, we divide this section into two categories: pre-printing press and post-printing press.

The intent and action of creating and distributing false information has been in existence even during the pre-printing era (Uberti 2016; Burkhardt 2017). Examples of fake news have been well-documented and are littered throughout history (Parkinson 2016). Some researchers (Soll 2016) argue that fake news has been around for a very long time and, consequently, has left a lot more destruction behind than any kind of news that can be imagined.

In the pre-printing era, fake news spread through rumors and false stories. In most instances, fake news stories served a political purpose – for political "character assassination." A famous instance of the use of fake news for political purpose involves Procopius of Caesara, the principal historian of the Byzantium Kingdom (Burkhardt 2017). He released a treatise called *Secret History* that discredited the emperor and his wife with wild and unverifiable claims (Burkhardt 2017), in a bid to curry the favor of the new, incoming emperor. During the Second Triumvirate in Rome (43 BC), fake news fueled internal jealousies and hatred amongst the three architects of the Triumvirate – Octavian, Antony, and Lepidus (Wright 1937). It was no secret that the three were naturally ambitious men (Weigel 1992) but the spread of fake news – untrue stories, unfounded tales of plots and counter-plots – destabilized the Triumvirate (Weigel 1992). Such bizarre stories also circulated during Emperor Ramesses II's campaigns in Egypt (1303 BCE) against the Nubians, Syrians, and Libyans as he consolidated his power, strengthened Egypt and fended off external threats (James 2000). One such piece of damaging news was that the Emperor's army had been defeated in battle by Sherden sea pirates (James 2000). The fake news story nearly caused mass panic and alarm in the Kingdom. Thus, for more than 2000 years, fake news has been part of humanity's news narratives, with almost the same intentions as today's Internet era – to inflame passions, raise alarm and cause (usually political and religious) prejudice. And, in most of these instances, fake news embodied the same sensationalist and extremist content.

This trend gathered momentum with the invention of the Gutenberg printing press in 1450. Printing allowed for fake news to become part of the emerging press outlets and could be distributed faster to a larger audience (Soll 2016). The advent of the printing press led to the mass production of pamphlets, books, and treatises that could circulate widely (Vicario et al. 2016). Yet, despite the development of mass printing, and mass circulation of reading material, the development of a code of journalistic ethics, such as truth-telling, did not arise simultaneously: an ethical code that would go in some way to hold journalists to professionalism, and, thus, help reduce fake news from the mainstream. There was also a plethora of news sources in the centuries up to the Enlightenment, around 1700, which were valued as official and unquestioned (Holan 2016). These included religious authorities, accounts, official publications, eyewitness accounts by sailors and merchants – all with a claim to authenticity. These sources, because of their "sacred predisposition," could easily become sources of fake news. As a result, fake news emerged from such "valorized" news sources and circulated easily. When spread by the so-called trusted sources, fake news could lead to deaths and the displacement of communities. For instance, on Easter Sunday in 1475, in Italy, a two-and-a-half-year-old boy called Simonino disappeared (Soll 2016). The Catholic preacher of the city spread fake news blaming the Jewish community for abducting the boy, beheading him and drinking his blood for ritual sacrifices (Soll 2016). The result was the public lynching and beheading of many Jewish people in the town. Others were displaced as the fake news spread (Soll 2016). Christian-Jewish hostilities that have culminated in violent anti-Semitism can equally be traced to the propagation of fake news (Myles and Crossley 2012; Kaplan 1985). The cultivated fake narrative that Jewish people drink children's blood as ritual sacrifice can be traced back to this period (Kaplan 1985).

Such fake narratives about other ethnic groups have proved to endure over time, and they have provided fodder with which other ethnic groups have later been treated. For instance, Goebbels' anti-Semitic propaganda of the twentieth century, which led to the Holocaust, thrived on such ancient and false myths about the Jewish people (Ivanova 2019). Between 1500 and 1600, as printing expanded and became commercial and dominant, fake news emerged as instrumental to boosting circulation figures (Standage 2017). News books or pamphlets ran fake stories of weird sightings. For instance, in 1654, a Catalonian news book reported the discovery of a monster with goat's legs, a human body, seven arms, and seven heads (Standage 2017). In 1611, an English pamphlet reported a Dutch woman had lived for 14 years without eating or drinking (Standag 2017). These are classic instances when fake news was intentionally manipulated as a commercial strategy. The invention of the printing press in the mid-1400s, like the invention of the Internet, increased the speed at which fake news could spread.

The coming of the Enlightenment, from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, was characterized by widespread philosophical and intellectual ideas, the growth of the (printed) mass media as we know it, and more fake news. These two centuries witnessed the overt practice of fake news production in mainstream media publications. This may be attributed to the intense commercialization of the media, which roughly began in these two centuries, or at least gained impetus. Like today, newspapers then began to source funding from advertisers. This exerted pressure on editors to pursue readers at all costs in order to attract advertisers (Mott 1942). Secondly, the period between 1700 and 1900 was characterized by political revolutions in many parts of the world, for example, the American and the French revolutions. Moments of political upheavals like these produce anxieties and are fertile ground for fake news (Joubert 2020). Through frequent publication of fake news surrounding "outrageous" French demands for a loan before negotiations, the press attempted, through fake news, to stir public opinion towards war.

From 1700 onwards, fake news evolved further, becoming a costly phenomenon associated with enormous loss of life. For instance, in 1761, a fake news story circulated in the city of Toulouse about Antoine Calas, who was alleged to have been murdered by his father, Jean Calas (Holan 2016). The fake news gained official recognition and the father was convicted, publicly tried and hanged. Concurrently, in the U.S., racial tensions became grounds for the propagation of fake news (Knopf 2017). The Lisbon Earthquake of 1755 sparked the production of an entire genre of fake news (Soll 2016). Fake news pamphlets spread stories that the earthquake was divine retribution against sinners, and that survivors owed their lives to the divine apparition of the Virgin Mary (Soll 2016). Across the Atlantic, in the U.S., African-American relations of the eighteenth century proved to be a "cottage industry" of fake news. For example, fake news swirled around imaginary and strange crimes committed by slaves around the U.S., including bestiality, cannibalism, and other weird and unverified accounts (Pettey 2003; Turner 1993). The French revolution, which dominated the eighteenth century, became notorious for its production of fake news (Burkhardt 2017). For example, fake reports of counter-revolutionary forces from Belgium mobilized at the behest of the beleaguered queen (Darnton 2017). These fake news stories about Marie Antoinette contributed to her harsh treatment by revolutionaries and subsequent demise on the guillotine (Pettey 2003; Turner 1993). In past centuries, before the digital era, it was not easy to verify if news was true or fake. This gave false news stories the same credibility and legitimacy as true stories, since fact checking, or debunking, was much more difficult in a time of information scarcity. The increasing veneration of the principles of truthfulness, objectivity and integrity began to inhibit the spread of fake news, especially in the 1900s. The absence of such standards was in itself a contributing factor to fake news. There were no professional norms which could be used as a measure of deviation or standard reporting. Newspapers evolved to be more professional (Raymond 2013), but the seeds of fake news had already been sown and were growing.

2 Fake News in the Modern Age (1800–1945)

2.1 The Spanish-American War and the Birth of Yellow Journalism

The early-1800s saw a turning point for news media and journalism in the United States with the advent of what became known as "yellow journalism." In this era (Emery 1972), societies were subjected to a steady diet of fake news. As Burkhardt (2017) notes, it was competition to break the news first and attract more readers and advertisers that led to fake news in this period. In 1835, the editor of *The New York Sun* ran a series of articles about astonishing sights witnessed by the British astronomer, John Herschel, from his observatory in Cape Town, South Africa (Standage 2017). The paper's editor, Richard Adam Loche, ran stories of observed great man bats that collected fruit and held animated conversations on the moon, along with blue-skinned goat-like creatures (Standage 2017). A total of six articles of these sensational observations became known as the Great Moon Hoax. The stories were initially believed, and despite the false nature of these articles, the paper's daily circulation shot up from 8,000 copies to 19,000 copies, ushering in the era of yellow journalism (Standage 2017). The newspaper never issued a retraction (O'Brien 1918).

The years of 1860–1920 ushered in the age of mass-circulated newspapers in the United States (Lutes 2011). The American Civil War (1861–65) saw the creation of large-scale war reporters and the use of the telegraph in wartime for faster transmission of information (Andrews 1964). After Joseph Pulitzer bought the *New York World* in 1883, and William Randolph Hearst acquired the *New York Journal* in 1895, they found themselves competing for increased readership, relying on tactics of sensationalism and scandal. In a battle to increase the circulation of their respective newspapers, Hearst and Pulitzer engaged in fierce competition, which historians refer to as the first press-driven war (Lutes 2011, 97–101). The Spanish-American War gained the support of the American people, who had previously opposed intervention in Cuba, largely through sensationalist and fabricated stories in the newspapers of Hearst and Pulitzer. These stories weaved invented tales of oppressed Cubans, persecution by the Spanish, and in great need of American military intervention. American sympathies grew as the papers published, though support for a war was not explicit (Cinquemani 2014). In 1898, the sinking of the USS Maine in the port of Havana, Cuba, killed hundreds of those aboard. Both papers were quick to blame the Spanish without any basis, with headlines reading "The Spirit of War Pervades the Breasts of All Americans" and "Maine was Blown up by a Mine or Torpedo", and urged the government to respond (Swift 1899). This reporting spurned Americans into action, including Theodore Roosevelt, who assembled a cavalry regiment, soon dubbed the Rough Riders by the press (Musicant 1998).

2.2 The Boer Wars

Preceding the Second Boer War (1899–1902), Britain's Forster Education Act of 1870 increased literacy rates and, as a result, the readership of newspapers rose and new papers were founded, including the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*. As a result, information consumption during the Boer War was vast compared to any wars of the past and the *Daily Mail* reached over a million people daily (Thompson 2000). Throughout the war, the Boers were presented as backward, savage, and primitive, compared to the more advanced British. Though there were more newspapers at the time than ever before in British history, nearly all were in favor of the war (Morgan 2002, 1–16). The war was also the first in which photography was able to be featured so prominently, initiating the era of photojournalism, as well as photo manipulation and use for disinformation (Morgan 2002, 1–16). Reporting focused not on the deaths of Boer children and their mothers in British concentration camps, but on the mothers being ignorant about nutrition and their children's health (Krebs 2004). A photo taken of an emaciated seven-year-old girl, Lizzie van Zyl, an inmate of a camp in Bloemfontein, was released in 1902 by *The Times*. This photo was used as a way to persuade the British public that Boer mothers were mistreating and neglecting their children as a further method of dehumanizing the enemy, which served to garner support for the war (Godby 2013, 171–183).

2.3 World War I (1914–1918)

The first of the World Wars brought about the foremost use of widespread mass media and government-backed and propagated fake news (Keil 2017). While today most news outlets claim a degree of freedom and objectivity, in 1914, they expressed political leanings more openly (Paddock 2004). A lack of first-hand information from the front lines due to a banning of journalists by many countries also contributed to incomplete or inaccurate information (Beurier 2014).

Prior to the American entry into World War I, stories of the atrocities appeared in magazines and newspapers (Kingsbury 2010, 66–68). When the *Lusitania* sank in 1915, a new wave of propaganda and disinformation arose. Of the most circulated fake news stories was one of a mutilated Belgian baby, purposefully harmed by German soldiers. This story was unique as it became transoceanic, spreading across America as well as France, appearing in *Le Rive Rouge* with photos allegedly depicting Germans eating the hands of the baby. Despite the implausibility of the survival of these handless babies and children, many claimed to have seen them first-hand (Graves 2007). Other stories included a nurse mutilated by German soldiers, crucified Canadian soldiers, as well as some of the first instances of doctored photographs (Ponsonby 1929). In the last months of 1914, the attention of citizens was turned towards Russia, with the idea that their soldiers passed through Great Britain on their way to the Western Front. Despite being false, this rumor spread around the country with myriad reports of citizens spotting Russian soldiers (Ponsonby 1929). These reports were published by *The Daily News*, *The Daily Mail* and others.

Concurrently, the British forces made calculated efforts to gain support and persuade China to take part in the war (Ponsonby 1929). As a strategy to vilify their German enemy, British propagandists developed atrocity propaganda and concocted the story of the German corpse factory, detailing how Germany was using the corpses of their soldiers as sources for fat during the British naval blockade (Knightley 2000). Though rumors had circulated since 1915, the story first appeared in the English-language press in China, *North China Daily News*, in early 1917. Several months later, the story appeared in articles in Britain's

Daily Mail and *The Times*. The effect was achieved and, in August 1917, China entered the war. In 1925, it was admitted by parliamentarian John Charteris and Secretary of State Sir Austen Chamberlain that the story was fabricated (Neander and Marlin 2010). Atrocity propaganda was used by all sides of the war, with stories of soldiers further mutilating women and babies spreading widely across Europe and the U.S. (Lawson 2020).

French newspapers during the time of the war tended to suppress news of enemy advancement and inevitable defeat and were some of the most censored press in Europe (Beurier 2014). In a time when the civilian population was hungry for information from the front, the first months of the war provided very little official information as journalists were barred from reaching the front. Newspapers invented letters and rumors to provide text for articles and to contribute to morale. News of how close the front was were also skewed in the press. Until August 1914, through news reports, the public had believed that the French troops were winning in Belgium and Alsace, when, in reality, the front ran from the Somme to the Vosges rivers, much closer than reported. News stories around the 1914 Battle of Marne exemplified this strategy, with papers stating that Germans were using shells made of cardboard, or that they had lost five million troops (Demm 2017). On the German side, though the army had to enact a quick retreat, leaving behind 50,000 prisoners, the German press proclaimed the capture of prisoners and French canons. Much of the false information disseminated in France at the time came more from a lack of authentic reporting and access as opposed to an orchestrated disinformation campaign. Interestingly, most of the exaggerated or invented accounts faded away as news from the front and first-hand military reports and photographs started to be supplied in 1915 (Beurier 2014).

The situation in Russia was somewhat different at the time, primarily due to the 40% literacy rate and low circulation of newspapers, as well as a lack of an overall cohesive and patriotic society. However, the will to fight against a common threat was apparent, and the public needed very little motivation to back the war effort. Despite the lack of a coordinating propaganda body, like Great Britain's, Russia spread disinformation through its 4th Department of the Quartermaster-General of the General Staff along with the press bureau of the Headquarters of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief with the aim of providing propaganda materials to newspapers (Medyakov 2014). The primary narrative was that the enemy was violating laws of war, along with the "otherization" of the Germans and their influence in Russian culture. The Russian press employed narratives of German orientalism, portraying their barbaric tendencies, and, in effect, positioning Russia as a champion of "the West" while Germany represented the East. Russian newspapers printed stories of the rapes and beatings of Russian tourists in Germany, and the city of Kalisz became a propaganda example of German atrocities, which led to the anger of the Poles as a consequence (Medyakov 2014).

One piece of false information, deemed misinformation, that travelled around the globe on November 7, 1918, was that of the armistice. This news, greeted by celebrations and cheers from Canada to Argentina and beyond, however, was not true. The news was spread in large part due to the United Press Agency president, Roy Howard, himself in France, who received a cable that stated Germany had signed the armistice agreement, fighting had ceased and the German-occupied town of Sedan had been taken by the U.S. military (Smith 2017). The message was transmitted to the British and the U.S. without passing French censors because they had left the building to celebrate. The message was received by Reuters who then circulated it among British papers, only to send a follow-on message 20 minutes later to correct the story, but the news had already spread (Beard 2016, 73–77). Work across the U.S. and Great Britain ceased, shops closed and workers abandoned their offices (Beard 2016, 73–77). The reputation of Reuters suffered greatly as a result and the Associated Press called for the court-martialing of Roy Howard, and for the United Press Agency to fund the clean-up of New York City following the celebrations of November 7. Ultimately, no real repercussions were conferred (Smith 2017).

3 World War II (1939–1945)

World War I served to lay the groundwork for disinformation in World War II and Germany did not forget Britain's disinformation campaigns. The stories in the foreign press about Nazi atrocities were easily decried by the Nazis, citing the corpse factory hoax of the previous war, by then known to Germans as disinformation (Neander and Marlin 2010).

Technology saw further developments in the interwar period, with radio reporting becoming more popular and relied upon for information. The outbreak of World War II is simply traceable to a single, well-crafted disinformation item. Faced with citizen fatigue from losses in World War I, motivation to enter another war was not forthcoming (Luckert 2019). In this section, we will outline examples from Germany, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States.

In August 1939, following months of reporting ethnic violence against Germans in Poland, a new plan was sought to bring about a reason to invade Poland. Orchestrated by Hitler, a radio station in German territory at Gleiwitz was raided by SS operatives in Polish uniforms. Incendiary words were broadcast in Polish, and several concentration camp inmates and prisoners were killed and left as proof of the violent raid (de Zayas 1992, 383–399). After U.S. correspondents were called the next day to view the damage, this false flag operation was reported widely in the United States and Great Britain. Germany invaded Poland that same day. While the intent behind the German initiation of the event and subsequent reporting was clear, those reporting the news in the West could be seen as disseminators of misinformation, without the explicit intent to mislead the public (Godson and Wirtz 2008). Fake reports abounded during this time, including information that German soldiers were receiving syphilis-tainted blood from captured Polish and Russian soldiers (Shaer 2017).

The strongest disinformation was certainly directed at those of Jewish decent, heavily vilified and demonized so as to provide a basis for atrocities to be willingly committed against them. The Wehrmachtbericht, a daily radio broadcast from the High Command of the Wehrmacht, was one of the primary sources for disinformation at the time, including portraying Operation Barbarossa in 1941 as a success against the Soviets, as opposed to the reality (Stahel 2009). The radio channel broadcast news about President Roosevelt being Jewish, Jewish crimes and false German victories (Murawksi 1962). All newspapers and information were controlled by the state, with the most widely disseminated newspapers, such as the *Völkischer Beobachter* (People's Observer), spreading stories of near-constant Nazi success in the war, plans to attack the United States for countering anti-Semitic policies and widely blaming most negative events on the Jewish people.

Much of German news revolved around the protection of Europe from the enslavement of Communism, and less so around pure German protection (Rhodes 1983).

No stranger to orchestrated propaganda campaigns at this point, Soviet disinformation during the period of World War II included stories of German killers, cannibals, widely circulated in the newspaper *Pravda* amidst general stories of fascist Germans. The overall Soviet disinformation machine would develop more after the war as the Cold War took hold. The primary narratives of the time were that Germany wished to exterminate the people of the USSR, atrocities committed by the Germans, the strength of the Soviet army and emphasizing the use of German allies for the most dangerous missions (Overy 2004).

The Ministry of Information of World War I in Great Britain was revived during World War II, making use of not only newspapers, but the now-popular cinema, as well as radio. One notable instance was that of the 1939 sinking of the SS Athenia, in which Americans, Canadians, and British were killed on the first day of the war. It was exploited as a way to invoke the same terror of U-boats from World War I. However, the Germans continued to deny involvement in the incident until the 1946 Nuremburg Trials, largely based on the fear that the United States would be persuaded to join the war should this attribution be made. The Ministry also disseminated information that the Katyn Massacre in Poland in 1940 was staged by the Nazis, information that was believed by the British public until well after the end of the war (Roberts 2012). Meanwhile, Germany used the massacre as a way to exaggerate Soviet crimes and further vilify their enemy.

The U.S. entrance into World War II was largely a result of the daring Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. But the very entrance of the United States into World War II may have also been based on a large piece of fake information in 1941 – that President Roosevelt was in possession of a secret Nazi map, outlining a reorganization of South and Central America, and the idea that Germany had their sights set on dominating the United States. Years later, it was discovered that the map itself may have been made by the British. Whether or not the president knew this is unclear (Blanding 2019).

Much of the disinformation and false stories circulating in the United States during this time involved a significant racial undertone, specifically anti-Japanese. The hysteria in newspapers of the time included fake stories of the mistreatment of prisoners, bayonetting Hawaiian babies, along with spreading the narrative that Germany had encouraged Japan to attack Pearl Harbor in 1941 (Dower 1987, 43–44). Meanwhile, both Germany and Japan were disseminating leaflets dropped on U.S. troops that black men were violating white women while white men were at war, which went as far as a Japanese short-wave radio station broadcasting news of lynchings and discrimination against African-Americans in the United States, often voiced by African-American prisoners of war. These nuances of pitting one nation's race against the minority and vice versa were also seen later in Cold War disinformation (Brcak and Pavia 1994, 671–684).

4 Fake News in the New Information Age (1945–1995)

The end of World War II did not mean that massive information campaigns ceased. During the ensuing Cold War (1947–1991), disinformation laundered by the Soviet government through the news outlets of other states resulted in some of the greatest hoaxes and disinformation campaigns that the public still remembers today. By using a blend of covert and overt methods, the Soviet government attempted to influence events and behaviors abroad, including government action. Strategies also involved discrediting and weakening governmental opponents, creating forgeries, as well as the purposeful dissemination of false information to be spread by

Soviet-friendly media (Cull et al. 2017). The most notable case was Operation Infektion, the story that the U.S. invented AIDS. By using a number of proxies and Soviet-friendly news outlets, it began in the *Patriot* newspaper in 1983 and spread outwardly across the world. This widespread campaign is illustrative of the Soviet Active Measures pattern of dissemination. A piece of information or story was given to an outside source, not known to be Soviet-affiliated, where the news would break. The story would then be picked up by Soviet news, citing the international investigative sources in a process of circular reporting or false confirmation to show legitimacy (U.S. State Dept. 1987). The impact through time has remained strong, with a 2005 RAND study revealing that 50% of Americans believed that AIDS was man-made and 25% that it was made in a government laboratory (Boghardt 2009).

To counter this threat, the United Kingdom created the Information Research Department, a covert research facility to respond to Soviet Active Measures, primarily active in the 1950s–1960s. The department created their own forgeries to be disseminated covertly, to include press releases and fake copies of *The Times* of North Korea depicting communist propaganda (Thomson 2010). The majority of the stories were circulated to maintain a constantly negative view of life in the Soviet Bloc. The department supplied materials to the *BBC World Service*, funded Reuters and assisted greatly in bringing down the Indonesian Communist Party through radio and newspapers to emphasize and exaggerate news of murdered Indonesian generals and their families (Thomson 2010). The department was also later involved in false information surrounding the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland. Media outlets such as *News of the World* featured invented tales of Soviet involvement in shipping rocket-launchers to Ireland and sightings of Soviet tankers off the coast of Ireland, as well as disseminated other fake news stories about the Irish Republican Army.

Following World War II, South African media took after the British model, with relative freedom and independent expression (Kolbe 2005). However, following the 1948 rise to power of the Nationalists, the press was significantly restricted and gave rise to considerable disinformation. Within the apartheid government, the Stratcom Department was created to spread messages and create campaigns to discredit their opposition (Knight 2020). A former employee of the department, Paul Erasmus, stated that the primary role was to "disseminate negative propaganda or disinformation against its enemies or perceived enemies" (Knight 2020). These Stratcom agents placed letters to media outlets on their doorsteps at night; the next morning, these pieces would become headline local news. Internationally, Stratcom, via Erasmus under a pseudonym, even published a smear-campaign piece in the U.S. magazine *Vanity Fair* about Winnie Mandela. This campaign to discredit Mandela was entitled Operation Romulus (South African Press Association 1997).

In the 1970s and 1980s, during apartheid in South Africa, the controlling regime had to rely on fake news in order to "take the offensive against those in opposition" (Nixon 2016, 71). The regime launched an operation codenamed "Acoda" – or "Operation Heartbreak" to try and influence political opinion in the U.S. and Europe. This operation involved the spread of fake news and propaganda on a massive scale to try and influence international public opinion (Nixon 2016). It is instructive to note that De Clerk, the last apartheid president, dismantled the propaganda apparatuses that had sustained the regime for about 50 years (Nixon 2016). Much of the propaganda was based on fake news stories of political reforms and black African terrorism which made it difficult for inclusion and reconciliation. The South African "Afrikaner media" (Kolbe 2005) ruthlessly spread fake news in order to delegitimize the anti-apartheid struggle. One consequence of this fake news strategy by the Afrikaner press was that it successfully split the anti-apartheid forces in the country (Kolbe 2005).

5 Fake News in the Digital Media Age (1995–Present)

In the digital media age, fake news has become an even greater concern, largely due to the ability of technology to facilitate the spread of information much more quickly than before. This is especially apparent during momentous events like war and elections (Kurtzleben 2018). Fake news and strategic disinformation during elections, wars, and other conflicts such as terrorist attacks, can be seen in different formats. These range from the proliferation of emotionally charged online fake stories, false vitriol aimed at certain groups, unverifiable sensationalist stories and outright lies about a political party or candidate (Cantarella, Fraccaroli, and Volpe 2019). Hartmann (2017) notes that, during elections, bots on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have been responsible for the spread of fake news. Fake accounts on these platforms have also been responsible for "ideologically extreme, hyper-partisan or conspiratorial" stories about election candidates (Hartmann 2017). Facebook, for example, had to suspend about 30,000 accounts that propagated fake news during the French elections in 2016 (Hartmann 2017).

The account of fake news during the 2016 elections in the U.S. is by now a very familiar story (Kurtzleben 2018; Gunther, Beck, and Nisbet 2018). The Hilary Clinton-Donald Trump campaign generated a lot of fake news that is now well-documented in the academic literature (Kurtzleben 2018; Gunther, Beck, and Nisbet 2018 and many others). In fact, both sides of the U.S. political divide were victims of fake news both domestically and as part of orchestrated disinformation campaigns, now attributed to the Russian Internet Research Agency. There was, for instance, a fake news story that Trump had a secret server that allowed him to communicate privately with Russian banks. The fake story went viral on online news spaces in the US. Pizzagate was also a notorious story alleging Hilary Clinton was involved in a child slavery ring operating out of a pizza restaurant in Washington D.C. This led to an armed man going to the restaurant to free the (non-existing) children. After the election and subsequent investigations the narratives spread, creating bigger rifts between political parties, widening racial divides and sowing general discord in the United States. Many of the accounts spreading disinformation in 2016 are still active today.

In the global south, particularly in Africa, Mumbere (2019) notes that elections on this continent "have a fake news problem." The concern with fake news in Africa has grown with each passing election. In 2018, in southern Africa, for example, Zimbabwean elections were riddled with fake news (Mumbere 2019). There was a fake news story explaining that the leading opposition candidate, Nelson Chamisa, had pulled out of the election (Associated Foreign Press 2018). In Malawi, Kondowe (2019) notes that WhatsApp had been the biggest propagator of fake news in the country's 2018 elections. Kondowe notes that one of the most notorious fake news stories of the Malawian election was that popular Nigerian prophet, TB Joshua, had prophesied that the opposition candidate, Saulos Chilima of the United Transformation Movement, would win the election. In a continent where prophets are revered, this fake news story, according to Mumbere (2019), had the potential to change voter opinions or cause election violence in fragile political environments. TB Joshua had to issue a statement denying the prophecy and dissociating himself from the elections.

In war and terrorist conflicts, fake news has become a preferred weapon (Husseini 2018). One characteristic of fake news during wars has been the circulation of often old and unrelated images to either "confirm" the savagery of either the conflict or one side in the conflict. This has been prominent in war contexts such as the Syrian War (Husseini 2018). In Syria, Husseini (2018) notes that the conflict has become a fertile breeding ground for bizarre fake news stories including unverifiable tales of cannibalism, dramatic rescue stories, unverified stories of extreme torture and many more. This has also been the case of the Boko Haram conflict in Northern Nigeria (Associated Press 2019). This has given rise to wild stories of Boko Haram insurgents drinking the blood of their victims with such stories pushing the ethno-religious conflict (Associated Press 2019).

In the digital age, there are four general characteristics that have generally defined the character of fake news (Kurtzleben 2018). First, fake news is rampant during momentous events like wars and elections. Second, it is spread by fake social media account profiles, bots and propagandists (Gunther, Beck, and Nisbet 2018). Third, fake news stories play into peoples' already existing biases and beliefs. Last, fake news goes viral quickly, which makes the argument that fake news is a platform problem valid. The consumption of news on social media platforms has facilitated the speedy increase in the quantities of fake news being consumed. New developments in technology, from deep fake videos, bots increasing the spread of information to record levels, as well as an increase in artificial intelligence and machine learning to create and distribute news, are potential current and future trends. However, as with any new technology, the advance is often faster than the ability to counter it.

Conclusion

The importance of historicizing and exploring this concept through the lens of extended history is to provide researchers, citizens, teachers, politicians and indeed anyone who comes into contact with information with the knowledge that the answers to today's current disinformation phenomenon may lie in learning from the past. The increased attention to the field of disinformation and fake news, while beneficial to build societal awareness of the issue, can also be problematic. It has been shown throughout this chapter that the generation of fake news can be politically or financially motivated, or sometimes the motivation is a combination of both. However, to dismiss all fake news as a scheme by media outlets to attract readership through salacious and misleading content disregards the very real and often malicious intent behind spreading fake news, disinformation, and other items that fall under the umbrella of the ecosystem of fake news – namely, information warfare or information operations. In these instances, as noted above in the cases of Soviet Active Measures or activities conducted by the Internet Research Agency, information is weaponized to create mass confusion, sow discord and generally pollute the information environment, and less so for monetary gain.

The common thread of all forms of disinformation in the past is their target – the human mind. By critically examining these tactics and the spreading of disinformation, along with societal effects, we become more aware of when similar tactics are deployed. By enhancing critical thinking skills, media literacy and general historical awareness, it is much easier to discern between real and fake news (Jones-Jang and Mortenson 2019, 1–18). Fact-checking organizations, non-governmental organizations that work with the public to build awareness, along with governmental efforts to be more transparent and build public trust are all efforts currently deployed to help stop the consumption and spread of fake information.

Standardization of terms to replace these "floating signifiers" (Farkas and Schou 2018, 298–314), which tend to be vague and empty of meaning, yet used ubiquitously, would also further debates and research in the field. The term "fake news," while a very straightforward phrase, does little to break down the categories, motivations and significance of items of false information, nor does it help stop their spread. The term is frequently co-opted by anti-democratic voices to encourage censorship, which is also greatly problematic. The Ethical Journalism Network, The European Parliament (Bayer 2019) and others have put forward clarifications to standardize the discussion between academics or member states. However, there is no concrete terminology reference. In fact, counterproductively, new terms are often introduced (Vilmer et al. 2018) without attempts to further refine or clarify already existing terms. This is especially problematic in academia when myriad terms are used in journal publications to essentially refer to the same topic even though, due to differing terms, they are often not read or referenced in conjunction.

As we look towards the future, both from a technical and societal viewpoint, there is no indication that the creation, spread, and consumption of disinformation, malinformation, or misinformation will cease. In order to create resilient societies, states must increase trust in public institutions, work together with social media and news platforms to ensure transparency and quality reporting without infringing on freedoms of expression as well as bolstering the awareness of society to provide a foundation for quality news consumption.

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