



A short guide to the history of 'fake news' and disinformation

A LEARNING MODULE FOR JOURNALISTS AND JOURNALISM EDUCATORS

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Information fabrication is not new. As Guardian columnist Natalie Nougayrède has observed: “The use of propaganda is ancient, but never before has there been the technology to so effectively disseminate it”.¹ So, it is important to understand the historical context when examining and reporting on contemporary manifestations of what has been termed a 21st-century ‘information disorder’².

Misinformation, disinformation and propaganda have been features of human communication since at least the Roman times when Antony met Cleopatra. Octavian waged a propaganda campaign against Antony that was designed to smear his reputation. This took the form of “short, sharp slogans written upon coins in the style of archaic Tweets.”³ These slogans painted Antony as a womaniser and a drunk, implying he had become Cleopatra’s puppet, having been corrupted by his affair with her. Octavian became Augustus, the first Roman Emperor and “fake news had allowed Octavian to hack the republican system once and for all.”⁴

The invention of the Gutenberg printing press in 1493 dramatically amplified the dissemination of disinformation and misinformation, and it ultimately delivered the first-large scale news hoax – ‘The Great Moon Hoax’ of 1835⁵. The *New York Sun* published six articles about the discovery of life on the moon, complete with illustrations of humanoid bat-creatures and bearded blue unicorns. Conflicts, regime change, and catastrophes then became markers for the dissemination of disinformation.

As one-to-many communications developed in the 20th century, especially with the advent of radio and television, satirical news evolved, sometimes being mistaken as the real thing in news consumers’ minds. Finally, as this guide illustrates, the arrival of the internet in the late 20th century, followed by social media in the 21st century, dramatically multiplied the risks of misinformation, disinformation, propaganda and hoaxes. Both errors and fraudulent content now go viral through peer-to-peer distribution (many-to-many communication)⁶, while news satire is regularly misunderstood and re-shared as straight news by unwitting social media users⁷. We now inhabit a world with computational propaganda, state-sponsored ‘sock-puppet networks’, troll armies⁸, and technology that can mimic legitimate news websites and seamlessly manipulate audio and video to create synthetic representations of any number of sources. In this environment, where trust becomes polarised around what “news” aligns with their views, many news consumers feel entitled to choose or create their own ‘facts’. Combined, these developments present an unprecedented threat level that can drown out journalism, as

1 Nougayrède, N (2018) *In this age of propaganda, we must defend ourselves. Here’s how*, The Guardian (31/01/18) Accessed 28/03/18: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jan/31/propaganda-defend-russia-technology>

2 Wardle, C. & H. Derakhshan (2017) *Information Disorder: Towards an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy-Making*. Council of Europe. Available at <https://firstdraftnews.com/resource/coe-report/>

3 Kaminska, I. (2017). *A module in fake news from the info-wars of ancient Rome*. Financial Times. Accessed 28/03/18: <https://www.ft.com/content/aaf2bbo8-dca2-11e6-86ac-f253db7791c6>

4 ibid

5 Thornton, B. (2000). *The Moon Hoax: Debates About Ethics in 1835 New York Newspapers*, *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 15(2), pp. 89-100. Accessed 28/03/18 http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/S15327728JMME1502_3

6 See Posetti, J (2018) *News industry transformation: digital technology, social platforms and the spread of misinformation* in Ireton, C & Posetti, J (Eds) *Journalism, ‘Fake News’ and Disinformation* (UNESCO) Forthcoming

7 Woolf, N. (2016) *As fake news takes over Facebook feeds, many are taking satire as fact*, The Guardian. Accessed 01/04/18: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/nov/17/facebook-fake-news-satire>

8 See Posetti, J. (2018). *Combating Online abuse: When journalists and their sources are targeted* In Ireton, C & Posetti, J (Eds) *Journalism, ‘Fake News’ and Disinformation* (UNESCO). Forthcoming.

well as contaminate it with the implication that there is nothing to distinguish it from false and fraudulent information more broadly.

This learning module designed to be used by journalists, journalism trainers and educators (along with their students) provides historical context for the analysis of the 21st century 'fake news' crisis. Relevant case studies and a timeline are designed to better inform users about the causes and consequences of 'information disorder' – from harassment of journalists by 'troll armies' to the manipulation of elections and diplomatic crises. While news media have historically been caught up in disinformation and misinformation, including through news hoaxes, this is not regarded as legitimate in the dominant contemporary paradigm across different news media. This explains in part why contemporary manifestations of disinformation and misinformation are mainly evident in social media systems – with grave risks to authentic journalism and to open societies more broadly.

The current crisis includes the 'weaponisation' of information by many governments, as well as abuse by an industry of public relations companies often under contract to political entities and actors. This risks an 'arms race' of disinformation efforts, which is arguably a recipe for mutually assured contamination of information environments in general as well as high potential blowback. Where disinformation campaigns have been exposed, the result has been major damage to the actors involved – both the implementing agencies and their political clients (see the cases of Bell-Pottinger and Cambridge Analytica below).

Propaganda, hoaxes and satire as historical features of the communications ecology

A selected timeline of 'Information Disorder' through the ages ⁹

- 📅 **Circa 44 BC – Mark Antony smear campaign**
Octavian's propaganda campaign against Antony deployed Twitter-worthy slogans etched onto coins to smear Antony's reputation.
- 📅 **Circa 1450 – Gutenberg printing press invented**
Invented 'facts' took off at the same time that news began to circulate widely in Europe, enabled by the printing press¹⁰
- 📅 **1835 – The Great Moon Hoax**
The *New York Sun* published six articles about the discovery of (non-existent) life on the moon, claiming to recount the findings of astronomer Sir John Herschel.¹¹
- 📅 **1899-1902 – The Boer War**
Propaganda perpetuated "the Boer" stereotype during this conflict in South Africa. It was popularised by the British Army to sway British public opinion to support an unpopular war.¹²

⁹ Note: This timeline is intended as a skeleton only and it is limited by the comparative lack of examples originally produced in languages other than English. However, journalism educators and instructors are actively encouraged to augment this timeline with examples from their own regions and in their own language to ensure it reflects participants' experiences

¹⁰ Soll, J. (2016). *The Long and Brutal History of Fake News*, Politico Magazine. Accessed 05/12/17: <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/12/fake-news-history-long-violent-214535>

¹¹ Andrews, E. (2015). *The Great Moon Hoax*, The History Channel. Accessed 01/04/18: <http://www.history.com/news/the-great-moon-hoax-180-years-ago?linkId=16545579>

¹² Kent, K. S. (2013). *Propaganda, Public Opinion, and the Second South African Boer War*. *Inquiries Journal/Student Pulse*, Volume 5 Iss. 10. Accessed 28/03/18: <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/781/propaganda-public-opinion-and-the-second-south-african-boer-war>

📅 1914-1918 – World War I

Propaganda played a crucial part in the recruitment effort, appealing to nationalism and patriotism: “Your country needs YOU”; “Daddy, what did YOU do in the Great War?”¹³

📅 1917 – The German corpse factory

British propaganda focused on demonising enemy Germans during World War I. In 1917, *The Times* and *The Daily Mail* printed articles claiming that due to a fat shortage in Germany, resulting from the British naval blockade, the German forces were using the corpses of their own soldiers to boil down for fats, bone meal, and pig food. This had implications during World War II, when early reports of Holocaust atrocities emerged. The disinformation contained within news stories in 1917 is said to have caused the accurate reports of Nazi atrocities to be doubted when they first appeared¹⁴

📅 1917 – The Russian Revolution

Russian Revolution-era propaganda emerges; one strategy involved using the Russian rail network to target ‘large audiences’ with catchy slogans and punchy colour.¹⁵

📅 1933 – Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda established

With the rise of Nazism, Joseph Goebbels established the *Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda* to spread Nazi messages of hatred-inciting violence against Jews, using all mediums - including theatre and the press. “Nazi propaganda was...essential to motivating those who implemented the mass murder of the European Jews and of other victims of the Nazi regime. It also served to secure the acquiescence of millions of others—as bystanders—to racially targeted persecution and mass murder.”¹⁶

📅 1938 – War of the Worlds radio drama

The War of the Worlds radio drama in the USA fooled many unwitting listeners into believing that Earth was being attacked, foreshadowing 21st-century responses to news satire. “No one involved with *War of the Worlds* expected to deceive any listeners, because they all found the story too silly and improbable to ever be taken seriously.”¹⁷

📅 1939-1945 – World War II

Edward Herzstein, in his book *The War that Hitler Won* (1978), described the Nazi propaganda campaign as “the most infamous propaganda campaign in history.”¹⁸ The Nazis demonised and persecuted Jews so effectively that atrocities were committed with popular support and Holocaust denialism continues in the 21st century.

📅 1955-75 – The Vietnam War

U.S. briefings on the war staged at the end of every day at a Saigon hotel were dubbed “Five O’clock Follies”.¹⁹ The US propaganda campaign, sometimes called the “Optimism

13 Welch, D. (2014). *Propaganda for patriotism and nationalism*. British Library: Accessed: 28/03/18
<https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/patriotism-and-nationalism>

14 Neander, J., & Marlin, R. (2010). Media and Propaganda: The Northcliffe Press and the Corpse Factory Story of World War I. *Global Media Journal*, 3(2).

15 Denisova, A. (2017). *How propaganda from the Russian Revolution brought about today's 'troll factories'* in *The Independent*. Accessed 28/03/18: <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/russian-trolls-us-election-brexit-roots-in-revolution-a8060711.html>

16 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC. *Nazi Propaganda*. Accessed 28/03/18:
<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005202>

17 Schwartz, A. B. (2015). *The Infamous “War of The Worlds” Radio Broadcast Was a Magnificent Fluke*, *The Smithsonian*. Accessed 28/03/18:
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/infamous-war-worlds-radio-broadcast-was-magnificent-fluke-180955180/>

18 Herzstein, R (1978). *The most Infamous Propaganda Campaign in History*, GP Putnam & Sons (NY) p492 See also: Kallis, A. (2005). *Nazi Propaganda and The Second World War*. Palgrave Macmillan. New York. P6

19 Homonoff, H. (2017). *Ken Burns’ ‘The Vietnam War’ Echoes Journalists’ Battle Against Fake News*, *Forbes Magazine*. Accessed 28/03/18:
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/howardhomonoff/2017/09/29/ken-burns-vietnam-war-echoes-of-journalists-battle-against-fake-news/#4fd51e242a78>

Campaign”²⁰, employed the ‘domino theory’ as a fear tactic to suppress opposition to the war²¹ - if one country came under communist influence or control, its neighbouring countries would soon follow.

📅 **1965 – 30th September Movement, Indonesia**

Members of Indonesia’s armed forces assassinated six high-ranking Indonesian Army generals. The head of the army’s strategic military reserve command, General Suharto, accused the Communist Party of the coup attempt and took over as the military’s de facto leader. In the months that followed, Suharto’s forces executed at least half a million people for association with communism. Suharto’s military dictatorship “made wildly inaccurate anti-communist propaganda a cornerstone of its legitimacy and ruled Indonesia with US support until 1988”.²²

📅 **1947-1991 – The Cold War**

During this period, international broadcasting was harnessed to influence populations to take sides.^{23 24}

📅 **1972-1990s – South Africa’s propaganda war**

South Africa’s apartheid government sponsored a sophisticated, secret, global propaganda and lobbying campaign to win support for, and counter opposition against, its apartheid policies. It targeted key opinion formers in Western capitals and was spearheaded by government minister Eschel Rhoodie. The campaign was exposed by local investigative reporters in the late 1970s but continued into the early 1990s.²⁵

📅 **1983 – April Fools interview**

The Associated Press reporter Fred Bayles interviewed pop culture historian and Boston University Professor Joseph Boskin, who tried to tell him the origins of April Fools were murky. Bayles kept pushing, so Boskin “created a story” about a jester who became king. Boskin expected Bayles would catch on, but the story was published – the news hoax succeeded.²⁶

📅 **1996 – The Daily Show begins**

The news satire and self-described ‘fake news’ TV programme kicked off in the USA, giving way to the rise of satirical news as a genre that became “some sort of corrective to, and substitute for, mainstream journalism”.²⁷

📅 **1998 – The Onion begins publishing online**

The USA-based news satire website started publishing online, with many of its stories later mistakenly taken as fact, as “fake news takes over Facebook feeds”.²⁸ In 2012, it

20 Moise, E (2017), *Lyndon Johnson’s War Propaganda*, The New York Times. Accessed 28/03/18: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/20/opinion/johnson-propaganda-vietnam-westmoreland.html>

21 Leeson, P. T. & Dean, A. (2009). *The Democratic Domino Theory*. *American Journal of Political Science*, 53 (3), 533–551

22 Bevin, V. (2017). *In Indonesia, the ‘fake news’ that fueled a Cold War massacre is still potent five decades later*, The Washington Post. Accessed 28/03/18: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/09/30/in-indonesia-the-fake-news-that-fueled-a-cold-war-massacre-is-still-potent-five-decades-later/?utm_term=.d5912c8b6060

23 Power, S. (2017), *Why Foreign Propaganda Is More Dangerous Now*, The New York Times. Accessed: 28/03/18. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/19/opinion/samantha-power-propaganda-fake-news.html>

24 Osgood, K (2017). *The C.I.A.’s Fake News Campaign*, The New York Times. Accessed 28/03/18: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/13/opinion/cia-fake-news-russia.html>

25 Nixon, R. (2016). *Selling apartheid: South Africa’s global propaganda war*. London: Pluto Press.

26 Laskowski, A. (2009). *How a BU Prof April-Fooled the Country: When the joke was on the Associated Press*, BU Today. Accessed 01/04/18: <https://www.bu.edu/today/2009/how-a-bu-prof-april-fooled-the-country/>

27 McChesney R.W. (2011). in *The Stewart/Colbert Effect: Essays on Real Impacts of Fake News*, edited by Amarnath Amarasingam, McFarland & Company, Inc. Accessed 28/02/18: <http://bit.ly/2kqhSYJ>

28 Woolf, N. (2016). *As fake news takes over Facebook feeds, many are taking satire as fact*, The Guardian. Accessed 28/03/18: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/nov/17/facebook-fake-news-satire>

published the story 'Kim Jong-Un Named *The Onion's* Sexiest Man Alive For 2012'. The Chinese Communist Party's *People's Daily* fell for it and reported on his new title,²⁹ as did the *Korean Times*.³⁰ #NotTheOnion became a commonly used hashtag to denote accurate stories that were parody-worthy.

– 📅 2003-2011 – *The Iraq War*

- In the run-up to the 2003 US-led coalition invasion of Iraq, as part of the post-9/11 'War on Terror', *The New York Times* published a series of articles including an account in 2001 that was "never independently verified" of a camp where "biological weapons were produced". Reporter Judith Miller's articles containing misinformation about weapons of mass destruction³¹ are said to be among those that had "the greatest consequences for America" and were cited by Bush administration officials as one of the reasons to go to war with Iraq³². It has been argued that *The New York Times* "presented the notion of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction as fact".³³ This episode became known as 'Weapons of Mass Distraction'. Debate continues about the newspaper's predisposition at the time to believe its sources without sufficient due diligence and thereby open itself up to manipulation by purveyors of disinformation.
- A former Iraqi diplomat, Muhammed Saeed al-Sahhaf, was Saddam Hussein's Information Minister during the war. His propaganda tactics were so colourful that he was treated like a parody, becoming known as 'Comical Ali' and 'Baghdad Bob' among Western media because of wildly inaccurate claims he made about the conflict. For example, he was filmed denying US tanks were in Baghdad even as they were seen rolling across the city behind him while he did a TV interview.³⁴

– 📅 2004 – *The New York Times issues apology over reporting of weapons of mass destruction*

"Editors at several levels who should have been challenging reporters and pressing for more skepticism were perhaps too intent on rushing scoops into the paper. Accounts of Iraqi defectors were not always weighed against their strong desire to have Saddam Hussein ousted." This was the reflective critique of *The New York Times'* editorial board about the paper's coverage of 'weapons of mass destruction'. "We consider the story of Iraq's weapons, and of the pattern of misinformation, to be unfinished business. And we fully intend to continue aggressive reporting aimed at setting the record straight."³⁵

– 📅 2005 – *The Colbert Report begins*

The satirical late-night television talk programme headed by a fictional anchorman began. The "striking emergence" of such shows in the USA has been called a "long-term

29 Wong, (2012). *Kim Jong-Un Seems to Get a New Title: Heartthrob*, The New York Times. Accessed 28/03/18:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/28/world/asia/chinese-news-site-cites-onion-piece-on-kim-jong-un.html>

30 Abad-Santos, A. (2012). *The Onion Convinces Actual Chinese Communists that Kim Jong-Un is Actually the Sexiest Man Alive*, The Atlantic.

Accessed 28/03/18: <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/11/onion-convinces-actual-chinese-communists-kim-jong-un-actually-sexiest-man-alive/321126/>

31 Miller, J. (2001), *A nation challenged: Secret Sites; Iraqi Tells of Renovations at Sites For Chemical and Nuclear Arms*, The New York Times See also: Miller, J. (2003), *After effects: Prohibited Weapons; Illicit Arms Kept Till Eve of War, An Iraqi Scientist Is Said to Assert*, The New York Times. Accessed 28/03/18:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/21/world/aftereffects-prohibited-weapons-illicit-arms-kept-till-eve-war-iraqi-scientist.html>

32 Southwell, B.G, Thorson, E.A. & Sheble, L. (2018). *Misinformation and Mass Audiences*, University of Texas Press. Accessed 28/03/18:

<http://bit.ly/2zTYX5j>

33 Friel, H. & Falk, R. (2004). *The Record of the Paper: How The New York Times Misreports US Foreign Policy*, Verso, London p. 21-23, p. 73-76.

34 Deprang, E (2013). *Baghdad Bob and his ridiculous true predictions* in The Atlantic March 21, 2013. Accessed 29/03/18:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/03/baghdad-bob-and-his-ridiculous-true-predictions/274241/>

35 The New York Times (2004). *From the Editors; The Times and Iraq*, The New York Times, 26/5/2004. Accessed 29/03/18:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/26/world/from-the-editors-the-times-and-iraq.html>

generational phenomenon".³⁶ The show's impact on politics, along with other 'fake news' programmes like *The Daily Show*, goes further than other satirical shows like *Saturday Night Live*, by blurring the lines between real and fake coverage, making satire less obvious: "much of what passes for serious coverage...has become a simulation of reality".³⁷

– 📅 **2010 – Egyptian State-run newspaper doctors photo of world leaders to place Egypt's President front and centre**

The newspaper *Al-Ahram* 'photoshopped' a picture of world leaders en-route to the opening of a session of Middle East peace talks in order to place then Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak at the front of the pack. In the undoctored image, he was in fact trailing behind the heads of state of the US, Palestine and Israel. The manipulation was revealed by an Egyptian blogger.³⁸

– 📅 **2011 – Syrian Civil War (ongoing)**

An information war was waged alongside armed hostilities in Syria as adversaries spread misinformation via social media and other digital channels in order to discredit one another. A spokesperson for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Syria, described an atmosphere of "information chaos".³⁹ Following incoming US President Donald Trump's deployment of the term 'fake news' in 2016, Syrian President Bashar Assad said "we are living in a fake news era"⁴⁰ in response to 2017 Amnesty International report⁴¹ of a "calculated campaign of extrajudicial execution" in a Syrian prison. The report claimed that between 2011 and 2015 up to 13,000 people opposed to Assad's government were secretly hanged. In April 2017, President Assad said reports of a chemical attack that killed 89 people were "100 percent fabrications".⁴² He suggested that photographs showing children who had died in the attack on a rebel-held town were staged, describing the entire incident as "fabricated" and "unconvincing".⁴³ However, collaborative forensic reporting by *The New York Times* fact-checked Assad's claim that the incident was 'fabricated', concluding that the Syrian government had dropped a chlorine bomb on an apartment building.⁴⁴

– 📅 **2013 – Australian media outlets publish fake press release**

In a cautionary tale of the "perils of speed before accuracy," several media outlets in Australia published a hoax press release saying the ANZ bank was withdrawing \$1.2

36 McChesney, R.W. (2011). in *The Stewart/Colbert Effect: Essays on Real Impacts of Fake News*, edited by Amarnath Amarasingam, McFarland & Company, Inc. North Carolina. Accessed 29/03/18: <http://bit.ly/2kqhSYJ>

37 Feldman, L., Leiserowitz, A. & Maibach, E. (2011). The Science of Satire: The Daily Show and The Colbert Report as sources of public attention to science and the environment in Amarasingam, A. (Ed) *The Stewart/Colbert Effect: Essays on Real Impacts of Fake News*, McFarland & Company, Inc., North Carolina. Accessed 29/03/18: <http://bit.ly/2kqhSYJ>

38 Schenker, J. & Siddique, H. (2010). *Hosni Mubarak Left Red Faced Over Doctored Red Carpet Photo* in *The Guardian* (17/09/2010) Accessed 29/03/18: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/sep/16/mubarak-doctored-red-carpet-picture>

39 Wade, M. (2017). *Cyberarmies, infowars and fake news add to Syria's suffering* in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (7/11/2017) Accessed 29/03/18: <https://www.google.com.au/amp/s/amp.smh.com.au/national/cyber-armies-info-wars-and-fake-news-add-to-syrias-suffering-20171105-gzf8a1.html>

40 Isikoff, M. (2017). *Exclusive: Defiant Assad tells Yahoo News torture report is 'fake news'*, *Yahoo News* (10/2/2017). Accessed 29/03/18: <https://www.yahoo.com/news/exclusive-defiant-assad-tells-yahoo-news-torture-report-is-fake-news-100042667.html>

41 Amnesty International (2017). *Syria: 13,000 secretly hanged in Saydnaya military prison - shocking new report* (7/2/17) Accessed 29/03/18: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/syria-13000-secretly-hanged-saydnaya-military-prison-shocking-new-report> (Full report: https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/human_slaughterhouse_report_o.pdf)

42 Smith-Spark, L. (2017). *Assad Claims Syria Chemical Attack Was Fabrication, in Face of Evidence* at *CNN.COM* Accessed 29/03/18: <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/04/13/middleeast/syria-bashar-assad-interview/index.html>

43 ibid

44 *The New York Times* (2018) "How we created a virtual crime scene to investigate Syria's chemical attack", June 24th. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/06/24/world/middleeast/douma-syria-chemical-attack-augmented-reality-ar-ur.html> Accessed 28/06/18

billion in funding from Whitehaven Coal's flagship mine project.⁴⁵ The press release appearing to be from ANZ bank was written by anti-coal campaigner Jonathan Moylan and directed media to a real executive. Moylan replaced the executive's phone number with his own.⁴⁶ Share prices in Whitehaven Coal plunged by 6%, wiping \$300 million off the company's value.⁴⁷

– 📅 2014 – Russia and Ukraine

Reports emerged of the *Internet Research Agency* (based in St Petersburg)⁴⁸ as conflict in Ukraine escalated. Former workers told *The Guardian* of being "paid to flood forums and social with anti-Western and pro-Kremlin comments"⁴⁹ and BuzzFeed cited leaked documents revealing workloads of "troll armies". According to these sources, on an average working day, the hired 'footsoldiers' were to post on news articles 50 times. Each blogger was to maintain six *Facebook* accounts, publishing at least three posts a day and discussing the news in groups at least twice a day. By the end of the first month, they were expected to have won 500 subscribers and get at least five posts on each item a day. On *Twitter*, the bloggers were expected to manage ten accounts with up to 2,000 followers and tweet 50 times a day.⁵⁰ The "Stop Fake"⁵¹ centre was formed in Ukraine, (and had spread to more European countries by 2018).

– 📅 2015 – Egyptian TV anchor portrays video game footage as evidence of Russian action in Syria

A TV news anchor is criticised for airing incorrect information, after he went to air praising Russian intervention in Syria as superior to US efforts: "Yes, this is the Russian army, this is Russian weaponry, this is [Vladimir] Putin. Yes, they are countering terrorism, truly countering it. Now you will see a terrifying video, terrifying." But the footage was sourced to a five-year-old YouTube upload from a Russian video game.⁵²

– 📅 2016 – Polls

United States: In the days immediately before and after the US election, "people shared nearly as much 'fake news' as real news on *Twitter*."⁵³ One particular 'fake news' story circulating around the time of the election outlined a supposed child abuse-ring allegedly led by Hillary Clinton, running out of a pizza restaurant called Comet Ping Pong.⁵⁴ It led one man to 'self-investigate' by firing an assault rifle inside the restaurant.⁵⁵ Additionally, *Facebook* says an operation, likely based in Russia, spent US \$100,000 on

45 ABC (2013). *The Perils of Speed Before Accuracy*, Media Watch, Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Accessed 29/03/18: <http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/s3682970.htm>

46 The original press release is here: http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/1301_fake.pdf Accessed 29/03/18 Note: This press release could be used in a tutorial exercise requiring students to assess its veracity

47 ABC (2013). *Whitehaven Coal shares plunge after media hoax* ABC. Accessed 29/03/18: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-01-07/whitehaven-coal-shares-plunge-after-media-hoax/4455362>

48 Chen, A. (2015). *The Agency*, *The New York Times*. Accessed 29/03/18: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/07/magazine/the-agency.html>

49 Walker, S. (2015). *Salutin' Putin: inside a Russian troll house*. *The Guardian*. Accessed 29/03/18 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/02/putin-kremlin-inside-russian-troll-house>

50 Seddon, M. (2014). *Documents Show How Russia's Troll Army Hit America*. BuzzFeed. Accessed 29/03/18: https://www.buzzfeed.com/maxseddon/documents-show-how-russias-troll-army-hit-america?utm_term=.vfBjqD48#.lSKMAZx9

51 <https://www.stopfake.org/en/news/> and <https://www.stopfake.org/smi-o-nas/> [Both sites accessed 15/06/18]

52 Phillip, A. (2015). *Egyptian TV Anchor Mistakes Video Game Footage For Russian Airstrike in Syria* in *The Washington Post*. Accessed 29/03/18: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/10/12/egyptian-tv-anchor-mistakes-video-game-footage-for-russian-airstrikes-in-syria/?utm_term=.18aaac1e8e35

53 Collins, K. (2017). *People shared nearly as much fake news as real news on Twitter during the election*, *Quartz*. Accessed 29/03/18: <https://qz.com/1090903/people-shared-nearly-as-much-fake-news-as-real-news-on-twitter-during-the-election/>

54 Kang, C. (2016). *Fake News Onslaught Targets Pizzeria as Nest of Child-Trafficking*, *The New York Times*. Accessed 29/03/18: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/21/technology/fact-check-this-pizzeria-is-not-a-child-trafficking-site.html>

55 Siddiqui, F. & Svrluga, S. (2016). *N.C. man told police he went to D.C. pizzeria with gun to investigate conspiracy theory*, *The Washington Post*. Accessed: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/local/wp/2016/12/04/d-c-police-respond-to-report-of-a-man-with-a-gun-at-comet-ping-pong-restaurant/>

thousands of U.S. ads on the social network over a two-year period, which included the election.⁵⁶ A *New York Times* investigation, and research from cybersecurity firm FireEye, said that Russian operators made *Facebook* and *Twitter* profiles of “fake Americans” and used *Twitter* bots to post “anti-Clinton” messages.⁵⁷

Brexit: A large-scale analysis of social media in the lead up to Brexit showed that “not only were there twice as many Brexit supporters on *Instagram*, but they were also five times more active than Remain activists.”⁵⁸ Similar patterns emerged on *Twitter*. Foreign accounts were reported to have sent “hundreds of thousands of pro-leave tweets on polling day.”⁵⁹ ⁶⁰

Philippines: *Rappler.com* deployed investigative journalism to identify and counter State-sponsored disinformation campaigns following the 2016 Philippines election.⁶¹ Their method included ‘big data analysis’, fact-checking and debunking deceptive social media content,⁶² exposing ‘sock-puppet’ networks. CEO and Editor in Chief Maria Ressa and many of her staff continue to be subjected to unrelenting online harassment linked to the State⁶³.

– 📅 2016-2017 – Troll farms and ‘fake news’-for-profit

As the US election approached in 2016, international media reports revealed a profitable troll farm run by teenagers in the small town of Veles in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. It was discovered that over 100 pro-Trump websites pushing fabricated news were registered in Veles, with one operator earning US\$16,000 in the final three months of the campaign⁶⁴. The content included viral fake stories about the Pope endorsing candidate Donald Trump and the ‘imminent indictment’ of Democratic Presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton. The operators of the fake news sites profited significantly from automated advertising engines (e.g. Google AdSense) tracking their sensationally false content. In the final weeks of the election campaign President Obama talked at length about the “digital gold rush” experienced by Veles’ fake news’ farm.⁶⁵

Hyperpartisan ‘news’ sites that deal in misinformation for profit are also prevalent in the USA. In 2017, a BuzzFeed investigation revealed that confected outrage feeding

56 Menn, J. & Ingram, D. (2017). *Facebook says likely Russian-based operation funded U.S. ads with political message*. Accessed 29/03/18: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-facebook-propaganda/facebook-says-likely-russian-based-operation-funded-u-s-ads-with-political-message-idUSKCN1BH2VX>

57 Shane, S. (2017). *The Fake Americans Russia Created to Influence the Election*, *The New York Times*. Accessed 29/03/18: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/07/us/politics/russia-facebook-twitter-election.html?mtrref=www.google.com.au>

58 Polonski, V. (2016). *Impact of social media on the outcome of the EU referendum*. Referendum Analysis. Accessed 29/03/18: <http://www.referendumanalysis.eu/eu-referendum-analysis-2016/section-7-social-media/impact-of-social-media-on-the-outcome-of-the-eu-referendum/>

59 Mortimer, C. (2017). *If you saw these tweets, you were targeted by Russian Brexit propaganda*, *The Independent*. Accessed 29/03/18: <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/brexit-russia-troll-factory-propaganda-fake-news-twitter-facebook-a8050866.html>

60 Hopkins, S. (2017). *Nigel Farage’s Brexit Poster Is Being Likened To ‘Nazi Propaganda’, Compared To Auschwitz Documentary Scene*, *The Huffington Post*. Accessed 29/03/18: http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/nigel-farages-eu-has-failed-us-all-poster-slammed-as-disgusting-by-nicola-sturgeon_uk_576288coe4b08b9e3abdc483

61 Ressa, M. (2016). *Propaganda war: Weaponizing the internet*, *Rappler*. Accessed 29/03/18: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/148007-propaganda-war-weaponizing-internet>

62 Ressa, M. (2017). *How Facebook algorithms impact democracy*, *Rappler*. Accessed 29/03/18: <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/148536-facebook-algorithms-impact-democracy>

63 Posetti, J. (2017). *Fighting Back Against Prolific Online Harassment: Maria Ressa* in Kilman, L. (Ed) *An Attack on One is an Attack on All* (UNESCO). Accessed 30/03/18: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0025/002593/259399e.pdf>

64 Subramanian, S. (2017). *Inside the Macedonian Fake News Complex*, *Wired*. Accessed 29/03/18: <https://www.wired.com/2017/02/veles-macedonia-fake-news/>

65 Remnick, D. (2016) *Obama Reckons With a Trump Presidency*, *The New Yorker*. Accessed 29/03/18: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/11/28/obama-reckons-with-a-trump-presidency>

massive Facebook engagement was the basis of the business model of one Florida-based company that produced false and misleading content targeting both liberals and conservatives, across a number of websites. Their objective: to “run up their metrics or advertising revenue.”⁶⁶

– 📅 **2016 – Facebook announces it will flag ‘fake news’**

After Facebook was accused of facilitating the spread of disinformation,⁶⁷ CEO Mark Zuckerberg initially dismissed the idea that ‘fake news’ shared on the site affected the US election.⁶⁸ But the company later announced it would collaborate with fact-checkers to combat ‘fake news’, as well as make it easier to report hoaxes and flag disputed stories.⁶⁹ In January 2018, Facebook backed away from including news in its ‘newsfeed’ after experiments suggested that its tweaks risked amplifying ‘fake news’.⁷⁰

– 📅 **2016 – Colombian hacker reveals he interfered with elections across Latin America**

Speaking to *Newsweek*, Andres Sepulveda claimed he was hired to disrupt and influence the outcomes of presidential elections in Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Honduras, El Salvador, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Venezuela from 2006-2014. Sepulveda claimed to have led a team of hackers that “stole campaign strategies, manipulated social media to create false waves of enthusiasm and derision, and installed spyware in opposition offices” during the 2012 Mexican presidential election.⁷¹ Sepulveda is currently serving a 10-year sentence for hacking-related charges during the 2014 Colombian election.

– 📅 **2016 – Pakistan’s Defence Minister issues nuclear retaliation warning in response to a ‘fake news’ story**

After reading a story on a false news site reporting that Israel had threatened Pakistan with nuclear weapons, Pakistan’s Defence Minister tweeted: “Israeli def min threatens nuclear retaliation presuming pak role in Syria against Daesh. Israel forgets Pakistan is a Nuclear state too.”⁷² The fictitious story contained a headline with multiple errors and the article misidentified the Israeli Defence Minister. In response to the Pakistan Defence Minister’s tweet, the Israeli Defence Ministry tweeted: “Reports referred to by the Pakistani Def Min are entirely false.”

– 📅 **2016 – US President-elect Donald Trump deploys the phrase ‘fake news’**

The US President accuses his journalistic critics (starting with CNN) of peddling ‘fake news’⁷³. His weaponisation of the term began to spread globally, with other world leaders also deploying the phrase against journalists and news organisations.⁷⁴

66 Silverman, C. (2017). *This is how your hyperpartisan political news gets made*, BuzzFeed. Accessed 29/03/18: https://www.buzzfeed.com/craigsilverman/how-the-hyperpartisan-sausage-is-made?utm_term=.vsG9XLWjgW#.iyepDoMLqM

67 Sonnad, N. (2017). *This is now what happens when you try to post fake news on Facebook*, Quartz. Accessed 29/03/18: <https://qz.com/936503/facebook-new-method-of-fighting-fake-news-is-making-it-hard-for-people-to-post-a-false-story-about-irish-slaves/>

68 Herreria, C. (2017). *Mark Zuckerberg: ‘I Regret’ Rejecting Idea That Facebook Fake News Altered Election*, Huffington Post. Accessed 29/03/18: http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/entry/mark-zuckerberg-regrets-fake-news-facebook_us_59cc2039e4b05063fe0eed9d

69 Mosseri, A. (2016). *News Feed FYI: Addressing Hoaxes and Fake News*, Facebook Newsroom. Accessed 29/03/18: <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2016/12/news-feed-fyi-addressing-hoaxes-and-fake-news/>

70 Frenkel, F., Casey, N. & Mazur, P. (2018). *In Some Countries, Facebook’s Fiddling has Magnified Fake News* in The New York Times. Accessed 29/03/18: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/14/technology/facebook-news-feed-changes.html?smid=fb-nytimes&smtyp=cur>

71 Robertson, J., Riley, M. & Willis, A. (2016). *A How to Hack an Election* at The Intercept. Accessed 29/03/18: <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2016-how-to-hack-an-election/>

72 Irish Times (2016) *Fake News Story Prompts Pakistan To Issue Nuclear Threat*, Irish Times. Accessed 29/03/18: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/asia-pacific/fake-news-story-prompts-pakistan-to-issue-nuclear-threat-1.2917737>

73 Pengelly, M (2017) *Trump Accuses CNN of Fake News Over Reported Celebrity Apprentice Plans*, The Guardian. Accessed 29/03/18: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/dec/10/trump-celebrity-apprentice-cnn-fake-news>

74 US News (2017) *See an interactive map tracking the spread of the term ‘fake news’ globally*, US NEWS. Accessed 28/01/18: <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2017-12-30/how-fake-news-charges-spread-around-the-globe>

– 📅 **2017 – Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and ‘Fake News’, Disinformation and Propaganda**

In early 2017, a joint statement was issued by the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the OSCE’s Representative on Freedom of the Media, the Organisation of American States’ Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, and the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information expressing alarm at the spread of disinformation and propaganda, and attacks on news media as ‘fake news’. They acknowledged the impacts on journalists and journalism:

“(We are) Alarmed at instances in which public authorities denigrate, intimidate and threaten the media, including by stating that the media is “the opposition” or is “lying” and has a hidden political agenda, which increases the risk of threats and violence against journalists, undermines public trust and confidence in journalism as a public watchdog, and may mislead the public by blurring the lines between disinformation and media products containing independently verifiable facts”.⁷⁵

– 📅 **2017 – US intelligence agencies assess Russia involvement in US election**

A report jointly published by America’s CIA, NSA and FBI in January 2017 claimed that Russian actors had sought to use “paid social media users or ‘trolls’” to influence the outcome of the 2016 US elections.⁷⁶ Google, Facebook and Twitter subsequently stated that Russian accounts had been identified in connection with political content distributed during the US election.⁷⁷

– 📅 **2017 – Venezuela’s President describes international media as ‘fake news’**

In July 2017, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said that media “spread lots of false versions, lots of lies. This is what we call fake news today, isn’t it? The era of post-truth.”⁷⁸ A month later, President Maduro described BBC and CNN as “manipulators of information” in a speech addressing the country’s Constituent Assembly.⁷⁹

– 📅 **2017 – Parliamentary inquiries launched into ‘fake news’ in the UK, The Philippines and Australia**

In the UK, the Culture, Media and Sport Committee launched an inquiry into ‘fake news’, asking, “What is fake news? Where does biased but legitimate commentary shade into propaganda and lies?”⁸⁰ Next, Australia announced the establishment of a Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism to examine ‘fake news’, propaganda and public disinformation.⁸¹ Growing concerns about ‘fake news’ and propaganda, the inappropriate leaking of individual consumers’ data, and failure to curb online bullying and offensive content led Australia’s national journalists’ union - the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) - to call on “digital giants” like Google, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to be “regulated similarly to broadcasters and forced to

75 UN/OSCE/OAS/ACHPR (2017). *Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and “Fake News”, Disinformation, Propaganda* Accessed 29/03/18: <https://www.osce.org/fom/302796?download=true>

76 https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf [Accessed 15/06/18]

77 Hudgins, J. & Newcomb, A. (2017). *Google, Facebook, Twitter and Russia: A Timeline on the ‘16 Election*, NBC. Accessed: 29/03/18: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/google-facebook-twitter-russia-timeline-16-election-n816036>

78 SputnikNews (2017). *Maduro accuses world media of spreading fake news on Venezuela*. Accessed 29/03/18: <https://sputniknews.com/latam/201707271055924853-maduro-media-fake-news/>

79 BBC News (2017). VIDEO: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=wd_oHi41lgk Accessed 29/03/18

80 UK Parliament (2017) ‘Fake News’ inquiry launched’. Accessed 20/03/18: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/culture-media-and-sport-committee/news-parliament-2015/fake-news-launch-16-17/>

81 Australian Parliament (2017). *Terms of Reference Future of Public Interest Journalism*. Accessed 30/08/09: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Future_of_Public_Interest_Journalism/PublicInterestJournalism/Terms_of_Reference; MEAA (2018) MEAA submission to the ACCC Inquiry into Digital Platforms. Accessed 18/4/18 <https://www.meaa.org/mediaroom/meaa-submission-to-the-accq-inquiry-into-digital-platforms/>

contribute a percentage of their revenue towards public interest journalism.”⁸² In the Philippines, the Senate Committee on Public Information and Mass Media conducted a hearing on the proliferation of fake, misleading news and misinformation online.⁸³

– 📅 **2017 – Presidential election in Kenya**

A representative sample survey of 2000 Kenyans eligible to vote undertaken three months ahead of the August 2017 poll found that 90% of respondents reported seeing false news, with 87% of people saying they had seen ‘deliberately false news’.⁸⁴ This content included disinformation material created to mimic legitimate news content, with the badges of media houses like BBC, CNN and NTV Kenya being misused to attach credibility to false news.⁸⁵ Misinformation and propaganda are not new in Kenya, however: “This election season has seen these migrate to popular social media platforms, to either play at existing beliefs, fears and biases, or to sway perceptions and even votes.”⁸⁶

– 📅 **2017 – National elections in France and Germany**

France: The British newspaper, *The Independent* reported that an Oxford University study found that “up to a quarter of the political stories shared on Twitter in France were based on misinformation”.⁸⁷ Thirty-seven news organisations and technology partners collaborated in an initiative called CrossCheck to verify and debunk ‘fake news’ stories in the lead up to voting.⁸⁸

Germany: In stark contrast to the 2016 US election, the German election campaign was largely unaffected by ‘fake news’.⁸⁹ However, the German parliament passed a law at the end of June 2017 that “imposed fines of more than \$50 million on Facebook and other social media companies that do not promptly remove illegal content”.⁹⁰

– 📅 **2017 – Qatari state news agency hacked**

An escalation of tension in the Middle East between Qatar and some of its Arab neighbours was described as “the first major geopolitical crisis to have been sparked by a computer hack”⁹¹. According to a report by Quartz, citing the Qatari government, the QNA news agency was hacked in May 2017, with a fabricated news story being subsequently uploaded to the site. The story contained what the Qataris claimed were fabricated quotes attributed to Qatar’s emir, Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani criticising US president Donald Trump and praising Iran as an Islamic power. It also quoted him speaking fondly of Hamas – a US-designated terrorist organisation – and the Muslim Brotherhood. In response, other media outlets in the region began publishing negative stories about Qatar, including accusations that it was working against US interests and

82 MEAA (2018) MEAA submission to the ACCC Inquiry into Digital Platforms. Accessed 18/4/18
<https://www.meaa.org/mediaroom/meaa-submission-to-the-accq-inquiry-into-digital-platforms/>

83 Rappler (2017). WATCH: Senate hearing on fake news online, Rappler. Accessed 20/03/18:
<https://www.rappler.com/nation/184192-senate-hearing-fake-news-online>

84 Portland and GeoPoll (2017). *The Reality of Fake News in Kenya*. Accessed 27/03/18:
<https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/325431/The-Reality-of-Fake-News-in-Kenya%20-%20FINAL.pdf?t=1502723966924>

85 Sambuli, N. (2017). *How Kenya Became the Latest Victim of Fake News*, Al Jazeera. Accessed 29/03/18:
<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/08/kenya-latest-victim-fake-news-170816121455181.html>

86 Ibid

87 Farand, C. (2017). *French social media awash with fake news stories from sources ‘exposed to Russian influence’ ahead of presidential election*, *The Independent*, link accessed 29/03/18: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/french-voters-deluge-fake-news-stories-facebook-twitter-russian-influence-days-before-election-a7696506.html>

88 BBC (2017). *Fact-checking fake news in the French election*, BBC. Accessed 01/04/18: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39495635>

89 Shalal, A. & Auchard, E. (2017). *German election campaign largely unaffected by fake news or bots*, Reuters, link: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-election-fake/german-election-campaign-largely-unaffected-by-fake-news-or-bots-idUSKCN1BX258> [Accessed 15/06/18]

90 Shuster, S. (2017). *Russia Has Launched a Fake News War on Europe. Now Germany Is Fighting Back*, TIME, link: <http://time.com/4889471/germany-election-russia-fake-news-angela-merkel/>

91 Salisbury, P. (2017). *The fake news hack that nearly started a war this summer was designed for one man: Donald Trump*, Quartz (20/10/2017). Accessible: <https://qz.com/1107023/the-inside-story-of-the-hack-that-nearly-started-another-middle-east-war/>

supporting terrorist groups, citing the fake QNA story. Computational propaganda also played a role, with a Twitter ‘troll army’ feeding the hashtag “#رطق_عم_تاقال_عطق” — “Cut relations with Qatar” — which was trending on Arabic-language Twitter in June, before Qatar’s neighbours did in fact begin to sever ties. Quartz assessed that the incident nearly became the “first ‘fake news’ war to transform into a physical conflict.”⁹²

– 📅 **2017 – Satirical news site blocked in Pakistan**

The Khabaristan Times, a satirical column and website that were part of the news site *Pakistan Today*⁹³ was blocked in Pakistan and therefore stopped publishing.

– 📅 **2017 – Attempted deception of Washington Post journalists**

The Washington Post, detecting deception from a confidential source, broke its promise of anonymity and exposed the fraud on its front page⁹⁴. This was a clear attempt by a malicious ‘fake news’ proponent to deceive journalists.⁹⁵

– 📅 **2018 – US President Donald Trump announces ‘Fake News Awards’**

President Trump issues ‘awards’ to several major news organisations against whom he wields the term ‘fake news’ in an attempt to counter their critique of him.⁹⁶

– 📅 **2018 – US Justice Department indictments in election meddling probe**

On February 16th, thirteen Russian nationals and a Russian internet agency were indicted by the US State Department in connection with a conspiracy to disrupt the US election. According to the indictment: “Defendants and their co-conspirators opened accounts at PayPal, a digital payment service provider; created false means of identification, including fake driver’s licenses; and posted on ORGANIZATION-controlled social media accounts using the identities of these U.S. victims. Defendants and their co-conspirators also obtained, and attempted to obtain, false identification documents to use as proof of identity in connection with maintaining accounts and purchasing advertisements on social media sites.”⁹⁷ The aim, the indictment indicated, was to disparage Democratic candidate Hilary Clinton, and boost the election chances of Donald Trump. This conspiracy was enacted by “people who adopted false online personas to push divisive messages, travelled to the US to collect intelligence, and staged political rallies while posing as Americans.”⁹⁸ Russian President Vladimir Putin insisted that the accused parties had not acted on behalf of the Russian government but he promised that they would never be extradited to face trial.⁹⁹ Subsequently, thousands of pages, accounts, forum threads and blogs were discovered to be connected to the conspiracy and removed by social media companies including Facebook, Twitter, Reddit and Tumblr.¹⁰⁰

92 ibid

93 Pakistan Today (2018). *Anthropologists make contact with remote cut-off tribe still thanking Raheel Sharif*. [online] p.Khabaristan Today. Available at: <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/01/11/anthropologists-make-contact-with-remote-cut-off-tribe-still-thanking-raheel-sharif/> [Accessed 6 Apr. 2018].

94 Boburg, S., Davis, A.C. & Crites, A. (2017). A woman approached The Post with dramatic — and false — tale about Roy Moore. She appears to be part of undercover sting operation, *The Washington Post*. Accessed 29/03/18: https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/a-woman-approached-the-post-with-dramatic--and-false--tale-about-roy-moore-she-appears-to-be-part-of-undercover-sting-operation/2017/11/27/oc2e335a-cfb6-11e7-9d3a-bcbe2af58c3a_story.html?utm_term=.c97203678d6d

95 Wilkinson, F. (2017). *It’s War and the Washington Post Knows It*, Bloomberg. Accessed 29/03/18: <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2017-11-29/it-s-war-and-the-washington-post-knows-it>

96 Al Jazeera News (2018). *Trump’s Fake News Awards Blasted as ‘Terrifying’*, Al Jazeera. Accessed 29/03/18 <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/01/trump-fake-news-awards-blasted-terrifying-180118083000110.html>

97 US Department of Justice (2018) Internet Research Agency Indictment. Accessed 16/06/18 <https://www.justice.gov/file/1035477/download>

98 Volz, D & Strobel, W *US Grand Jury indicts 13 Russian Nationals in State Department Prob*, Reuters. Accessed 16/06/18 <https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-trump-russia/u-s-grand-jury-indicts-13-russian-nationals-in-election-meddling-probe-idU5L2N1Q619M>

99 Pengelly, M (2018) *Putin: Russia will never extradite 13 nationals indicted by mueller* *The Guardian*. Accessed 16/06/18 <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/mar/04/vladimir-putin-never-extradite-13-russians-robert-mueller>

100 Aleem, Z (2018) *Reddit Just Shutdown Nearly 1000 Russian Troll Accounts*, Vox Accessed 16/06/18 <https://www.vox.com/world/2018/4/11/17224294/reddit-russia-internet-research-agency> .

– 📅 **2018 – Fake philanthropist causes diplomatic issue between Brazil and Venezuela**

A reportedly mentally ill Brazilian man based in Los Angeles used social media to trick reputable media organisations, the Brazilian Bar Association, the governments of Venezuela and Brazil, a host of diplomats, far-right groups, and several human rights organisations into believing that he was a philanthropist running an NGO raising funds to care for malnourished Venezuelan children. The subsequent diplomatic storm triggered by the online response to the 'philanthropist's' work resulted in Brazil and Venezuela expelling the top diplomats from the opposing country. While one newspaper referred to the man as a representative of a US NGO, Venezuelan authorities arrested and imprisoned him for 11 days, accusing him of being connected to a criminal organisation with international reach. Neither story was true. A global campaign organised via a hashtag resulted in his eventual release and deportation.¹⁰¹

– 📅 **2018 – Journalistic coverage causes collapse of disinformation campaign in South Africa**

Closure of prestigious UK Public Relations company, Bell Pottinger, which had been exposed as a key actor in what a press report described as a "large-scale fake news propaganda war in South Africa"¹⁰². The UK company, along with a marketing firm based in India, had been part of a long and secret campaign to foment racial polarisation, carried out to discredit critics of the then South African president Jacob Zuma and the Gupta business family who paid the (expensive) bills. The disinformation was spread through websites, tweets (amplified by bots), misleading online adverts, covert exploitation of Facebook and Wikipedia, as well as hacks and malicious leaks. Journalists who exposed "state capture" by the Gupta family (who reportedly decided who would be appointed as cabinet ministers in the country) were subjected to accusations of being lapdogs of "white monopoly capital".¹⁰³ Editor Ferial Haffajee was targeted in a campaign of online harassment during this period, which saw her image manipulated to create false impressions of her character.^{104 105}

– 📅 **2018 – European Union report on 'fake news'**

In late 2017, the European Union created a high level expert group on 'fake news' and online disinformation which reported in early 2018 with various solutions recommended, although it did not call for state regulation.¹⁰⁶ The report recommended more transparency of online news and its circulation; increased media and information literacy to counter disinformation; tools for empowering users and journalists to tackle disinformation and foster a positive engagement with fast-evolving information technologies; steps to safeguard the diversity and sustainability of the European news media ecosystem, and continued research.

101 Filho, J. (2018). *Brazilian Right Wing Fell Hard for a Fake News Story About Venezuela Provoking a Diplomatic Incident*, The Intercept. Accessed 29/03/18: <https://theintercept.com/2018/01/15/fake-news-brazil-venezuela/>

102 Times Live (2017) *The Guptas, Bell Pottinger and the fake news propaganda machine*. 04 September 2017. Accessed 29/03/18 <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2017-09-04-the-guptas-bell-pottinger-and-the-fake-news-propaganda-machine/>

103 Dummy's guide: Bell Pottinger – Gupta London agency, creator of WMC <https://www.biznews.com/global-citizen/2017/08/07/dummys-guide-bell-pottinger-gupta-wmc/>; How Bell Pottinger, P.R. Firm for Despots and Rogues, Met Its End in South Africa. *New York Times*, 4 Feb 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/04/business/bell-pottinger-guptas-zuma-south-africa.html>

104 Haffajee, F. (2017). *Ferial Haffajee: The Gupta fake news factory and me*. HuffPost South Africa. [online] Available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.za/2017/06/05/ferial-haffajee-the-gupta-fake-news-factory-and-me_a_22126282/ [Accessed 6 Apr. 2018].

105 See Posetti, J (2018) *Combating Online abuse: When journalists and their sources are targeted* In Ireton, C & Posetti, J (Eds) *Journalism, 'Fake News' and Disinformation* (UNESCO). Forthcoming.

106 EU (2018). *Final report of the High-Level Expert Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation*. Accessed 27/03/18 <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/final-report-high-level-expert-group-fake-news-and-online-disinformation>

– 📅 **2018 – Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Regional Court of Justice finds against ‘false news’ laws in Gambia**

In February 2018, in an historic ruling by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Regional Court of Justice, Gambia’s laws on sedition, false news and criminal defamation were found to violate the right to freedom of expression¹⁰⁷. The case was filed in 2015 by the Federation of African Journalists in exile. Two journalists were subjected to torture under the laws while in the custody of Gambia’s National Intelligence Agency. At the time of writing, the new Gambian government had not responded to the ruling. However, as more States began considering regulating against ‘fake news’ (see the cases of Germany and Malaysia identified above), this judgement served as a timely reminder of the risks to freedom of expression posed by such regulatory responses.

– 📅 **2018 – Australia’s Immigration Minister sparks alt-right propaganda-linked racism row with South Africa & declares criticism ‘fake news’**

Australia’s Border Protection and Immigration Minister Peter Dutton caused a diplomatic row when he responded to problematic journalism inspired by far-right propaganda about land redistribution plans in South Africa, by promising to consider creating a special visa category to fast-track asylum seeker claims from white (only) South African farmers¹⁰⁸. At the base of his claim that these people needed ‘saving’ by a “civilised country” was a cache of disinformation, but he decried journalism critical of his comments as ‘fake news’: “If people think I’m going to cower or take a backward step because of their nonsense, fabricated, ‘fake news’ criticism, then they’ve got another thing coming,” he told a radio interviewer.¹⁰⁹

– 📅 **2018 – Cambridge Analytica Scandal**

In March 2018, a whistleblower revealed to *The Observer*, *The New York Times* and Channel 4 News that a massive dataset drawn from millions of Facebook users had been exploited by a Cambridge University psychology academic (working privately), and a network of businesses that operated under the umbrella of ‘Cambridge Analytica’ – a company specialising in psychological profiling and micro-targeted political messaging. The company used the data to target specific sets of voters in the lead up to the USA’s 2016 Presidential Election. According to undercover reporting by Channel 4, company executives boasted of using their data to target audiences with propaganda and misinformation. Steve Bannon had been the company’s Vice President until he left to run Donald Trump’s election campaign in 2016.¹¹⁰ Undercover reporters captured Cambridge Analytica executives boasting that the company and its partners had worked on more than 200 international elections, including in Argentina, Nigeria, Kenya, India, and the Czech Republic. The Cambridge Analytica whistleblower, Christopher Wylie, also claimed that the company “cheated” the 2017 Brexit vote.¹¹¹ The company closed down in the wake of the disclosures.

¹⁰⁷ Amnesty International (2018). Gambia: Regional Court Rules Draconian Media Laws Violate Human Rights. Accessed 29/03/18: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2018/02/gambia-regional-court-rules-draconian-media-laws-violate-human-rights/>

¹⁰⁸ Wilson, J. (2018). Peter Dutton’s offer to white South African farmers started on the far right in *The Guardian*. Accessed 30/03/18: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/mar/16/peter-duttons-offer-to-white-south-african-farmers-started-on-the-far-right>

¹⁰⁹ AFP (2018). Crazy lefties are dead to me: Aus minister pushes ahead with SA farmer plan, *Mail&Guardian*. Accessed 29/03/18: <https://mg.co.za/article/2018-03-22-crazy-lefties-are-dead-to-me-aus-minister-pushes-ahead-with-sa-farmer-plan>

¹¹⁰ Lee, G. (2018). Q&A on Cambridge Analytica: The allegations so far, explained, *FactCheck*, Channel 4 News. Accessed 29/03/18: <https://www.channel4.com/news/factcheck/cambridge-analytica-the-allegations-so-far>

¹¹¹ Cassidy, J. (2018). Cambridge Analytica Whistleblower claims that cheating swung the Brexit vote, *The New Yorker*. Accessed 29/03/18: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/a-cambridge-analytica-whistleblower-claims-that-cheating-swung-the-brexit-vote>

– 📅 **2018 – Unprecedented UN Special Rapporteurs' joint statement calling on India to protect a journalist against disinformation fuelled attacks**

Prolific online harassment of independent investigative journalist Rana Ayyub elicited a call from five United Nations special rapporteurs for the Indian government to provide protection, following the mass circulation of false information aimed at countering her critical reporting. Ayyub was targeted with disinformation about her on social media, including 'deepfake' videos that falsely suggested she had made pornographic films, as well as direct rape and death threats.¹¹² She identified these attacks as having links to the Indian Government.

– 📅 **2018 – Developments in the attempted regulation of 'fake news'**

In January, Germany's 2017 Network Enforcement Act came into effect¹¹³, requiring social media platforms to remove and block 'fake news', potentially hate-inciting content, and other illegal content prohibited by the Criminal Code, within 24 hours of being notified of the same, with violations resulting in a fine of up to 50 million euros.

India proposed, then withdrew, rules that would allow the government to remove accreditation from journalists found to have written or broadcast 'fake news'.¹¹⁴

In April, Malaysia passed a new law criminalising "news, information, data and reports which is or are wholly or partly false," with provision for a fine of US\$123,000 and up to six years in prison. However, after elections, the new Communications and Multimedia Minister announced that the law would be abolished.¹¹⁵

In May, Kenya's president signed into law the Computer and Cybercrimes Bill which states that if a person "intentionally publishes false, misleading or fictitious data or misinforms with intent that the data shall be considered or acted upon as authentic," they can face a penalty of up to almost US\$ 50 000 or two years in jail.¹¹⁶

Singapore issued a Green Paper on the challenges and implications of deliberate online falsehoods in January 2018, and the parliament held public hearings on the topic in March. The Philippines had three Bills against 'fake news' pending before its legislature.¹¹⁷ Cambodia was reported to be mulling an anti-'fake news' law.

Belarus's prosecutor general announced a draft bill to reportedly prevent the spread of false statements that "turn public opinion upside down, which leads to big consequences".¹¹⁸

112 UN experts call on India to protect journalist Rana Ayyub from online hate campaign <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23126&LangID=E>; Accessed 17/08/18 See also Ayyub, R. (2018). In India, journalists face slut-shaming and rape threats. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/22/opinion/india-journalists-slut-shaming-rape.html> Accessed 17/06/18

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118 Minter, A. Fake News Laws Are Fake Solution Bloomberg Opinion. Accessed 15/06/18 <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2018-05-25/fake-news-laws-are-fake-solution>

- | The Brazilian Congress was considering a Bill which will criminalise the publication and
- | sharing of any false or incomplete information on the Internet to the detriment of any
- | private individual or legal person.¹¹⁹

Module Aims

- To increase participants' awareness of the history of uses of news formats for reasons alien to journalistic ethics and standards
- To enable participants to better recognise the context of instrumentalising information for personal or political gain, profit, or entertainment purposes
- To increase awareness of the role that news satire has played in both informing and confusing news outlets and news consumers
- To equip participants to be better prepared to analyse new threats in historical contexts

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this module, participants will:

1. Appreciate the historical context, causes and consequences of propaganda and news hoaxes
2. Be able to appreciate the role and value of news satire in critiquing power-wielders, while also understanding the confusion it can cause within audiences
3. Understand the new features of 'fake news' architecture (such as automated 'bots' and social media virality), in contrast with historical manifestations.
4. Be able to report on the 'fake news' crisis with more nuance

Module Format

This module is designed to be delivered face-to-face or online. It is intended for execution in two parts: theoretical and practical.

Linking Plan to Learning Outcomes

¹¹⁹ Muthusubbarayan, M. 2018. Fake news: What countries around the world are doing to combat the epidemic <https://qrius.com/fake-news-countries-combat-epidemic/>

A: Theoretical

Module Plan	Number of Hours	Learning Outcomes
An interactive lecture and question/answer session, which could be delivered traditionally, or via a webinar platform that encourages remote participation. Lecture content can be drawn from the synopsis and timeline above. However, instructors are encouraged to also include culturally/locally relevant points.	90 minutes	1, 2, 3

B. Practical

Module Plan	Number of Hours	Learning Outcomes
<p>A workshop/tutorial which could be facilitated in a traditional classroom setting, or via an eLearning platform like Moodle, Facebook groups, or other services that enable remote online participation. The workshop/tutorial exercise could adopt the following format:</p> <p>i) Tutorial groups to be divided into working groups of 3-5 participants each</p> <p>ii) Each working group is to be provided with an example of a. contemporary propaganda b. contemporary news satire c. a contemporary example of a news hoax</p> <p>iii) Each working group must: collaboratively assess the material (research the individual/group behind the material); compare with the historical material in each case (i.e. what parallels and differences can they draw with historical case studies presented in the timeline above?). They should also refer to relevant research/readings and identify the new elements/features in each case (i.e. the features particular to the Digital Era)</p> <p>iv) Each group should collaboratively write a 400-word summary of their analysis) and submit to their lecturer/tutor for review.</p>	90-120 minutes	1, 2, 3, 4
<p>Alternative exercise:</p> <p>Participants could be asked to map additional entries from their own countries on the timeline</p>		1, 2, 3

Suggested Assignment

Write a 2000-word essay (with reference to academic/scholarly sources) about the historical context of a contemporary incidence of a. propaganda or b. news satire or c. a news hoax. Learners should compare and contrast historically evidenced and new (Digital Era) features of the case they select, explaining the ways in which the impacts of the case are both similar and different to historic parallels.

Materials

The timeline supplied could be reproduced as an interactive resource (with 'clickable' references and articles embedded, or pop-up information boxes).

Readings

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