THE HISTORY AND SPREAD OF AMERICAN FAKE NEWS AND WHAT ORGANIZATIONS CAN LEARN FROM OTHERS TO FIGHT IT

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Shandi S. Greve Penrod

ABSTRACT

The History and Spread of American Fake News and What Organizations Can Learn from Others to Fight It

by
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This paper provides a literature review of some of the existing information about the creation and spread of fake news; a historical foundation of American fake news and today's media landscape; an explanation of how fake news is spread by content creators, social media users, and technology; and definitions of fake news for today's discourse. Literature reviews and an interview with the sitting mayor of Wood River, Illinois, are used to develop case studies that examine how five organizations use communication strategies to fight fake news. Eight articles documenting how professional communicators suggest responding to fake news are also examined. Finally, this research is synthesized into a set of communication strategies with which today's organizations can fight fake news attacks. This paper does not, however, provide an analysis of the given strategies or make judgments as to the best strategies and tactics to use at any given time.

A good definition of fake news for today's discourse should take both facticity and intent to deceive into account. Journalistic news is expected to be factual and is known for a few easily recognized formats; this creates the expectation that reports presented in such formats are factual. Even so, the term fake news rarely applies to satire and parody, which aim to entertain and provide commentary rather than passing as journalistic reporting. A good definition of fake news for scholarly and critical public discourse is an account of an event, presented in a style expected

of journalistic news media, which is both low in facticity and high in immediate intention to deceive.

In common discourse, however, fabricated facts are often casually described as fake news. Because powerful influencers and their followers insist on using the term fake news to discredit critics, one cannot assume that a given speaker is using the given or any other particular definition of fake news unless a definition is specifically stated. The term can mean practically anything depending on the speaker. This has led some to argue that the term fake news means nothing (Wemple). Yet, this is not the case. Just as the term tea can be used specifically to describe steeped leaves from the *Camellia sinensis* plant or to describe any infusion of leaves, herbs, and fruit in water, fake news can effectively have multiple uses ("What Is the Difference"). Therefore, the term fake news is also an umbrella term for untrue reports; it's a catch-all for false information, including misinformation, disinformation, satire, parody, misappropriation, fabrication, et cetera. Due to the historical multitude of ways the term fake news has been used, the examination of the history of fake news in this paper will likewise use the term fake news to include all the types of fake news.

In some sections of this paper, more specific terms are needed for clarification. Wardle distinguishes between two types of low-facticity reports: misinformation and disinformation (Wardle). Misinformation is information that is unintentionally false, and disinformation is "the deliberate creation and sharing of information known to be false" (Wardle). Specifically, disinformation is used to describe the conspiratorial trolling campaigns maliciously used by actors such as Russia, the malicious and purposeful ideological false news published by individuals, and other intentionally and patently false reports. Misinformation refers to unintentionally false information that, nonetheless, spreads through media.

Colonial Americans first saw published fake news in the 1600s when a printer defamed the king of France (Campbell et al. 272). Since then, the prominence of fake news has ebbed and flowed through the centuries, increasing with the advent of each new communication medium; the most recent wave began shortly after the Internet was developed and opened to the public (Burkhardt 5-8, 11). The open Internet has meant that anyone can publish inaccurate data and get it in front of audiences (11-12). Social media algorithms have made it worse by creating social bubbles for each user, made apparent in October 2016 when Buzzfeed News published a report about the high prevalence of fake news on Facebook (Burkhardt 11-12; Silverman, et al.). Making the report particularly significant was the news broken earlier that summer that Russia meddled in the election process through an organized and state-funded disinformation campaign using troll factories, social bots, and fake social media accounts (Ashbrook; Curtis). Entrepreneurs from the United States were creating fake news, too, although the motivation came primarily from lucrative advertising revenue rather than international political influence (Burkhardt 7-8; Wordsworth; Marantz).

The organic spread of fake news on social media has also been tremendous (Allcott and Gentzkow 219). One survey looked at over 3,000 adults after the 2016 U.S. presidential election and found that fake news headlines were both remembered by and fooled American adults about 75 percent of the time (West). This may in part be because people often share news posts of articles without clicking through and reading the article (Burkhardt 12). The number of times a message is seen, the medium through which it is broadcasted, the state of mind of the user at the time of the message, the existing beliefs and ideologies of the user, social pressures, and social media algorithms all affect whether the message will be believed and shared (West; Ashbrook).

The influence of fake news could have serious consequences for American society and has already had consequences for organizations. A vicious story dubbed Pizzagate led true believers to threaten the lives of the Comet Ping Pong staff members and their families, thought to be part of a pedophilia ring (Gillin; Hynum and Cray). Planned Parenthood was targeted with highly edited and misleading videos that led to a nation-wide uproar and several state legislatures attempting to end financial support of Planned Parenthood's non-abortive healthcare services (Groch-Begley and Boguhn; "DOJ"). Starbucks faced several iterations of false rumors claiming the company was anti-military, hurting the company's image and, presumably, sales (Snopes Staff). FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, found it necessary to preemptively respond to manipulated photographs that would historically resurface on social media in the aftermath of hurricanes; such fake news can cause unnecessary problems for emergency responders trying to reach flood victims, they explained (Naylor; @BuzzFeedNews). The City of Wood River, Illinois, was inundated with calls from residents after a fabricated announcement about leaf burning from a fake Wood River city council website began spreading; the real City of Wood River feared a potential fire to their city, which was in the middle of a drought (Maguire).

Communication professionals, agencies, and researchers also provide insight into the management of fake news, and this paper provides a review of literature by Hubbell Communications, Eddie Velez of Success by Design, Katie Creaser of Affect Communications and *PR News*, Ellen Hartman of Hartman Public Relations and *Restaurant Informer*, Lisa Arledge Powell of MediaSource and the Public Relations Society of America's Health Academy Conference, Nikhail Dey of Genesis Burson-Marsteller and Asia-Pacific Innovation Summit, Gheorge-Ilie Fârte and Daniel-Rareş Obadă of Alexandru Ioan Cuza University Department of

Communication Science and Public Relations, and William Benoit of the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Organizations need strategies for countering fake news, and this paper tackles this need by studying both how the mentioned organizations responded to fake news attacks and the advice given by communications experts regarding fake news management as a part of crisis communication. In total, this paper garnered a set of 27 proactive and reactive communication strategies for organizations to use in fighting fake news attacks. Proactive strategies include having at least one communications staff person, developing a fake news crisis communication plan, consistently monitoring social media, building relationships with reporters and influencers, creating real content and citing sources, issuing prebuttals to predictable fake news, constructing a webpage to respond to rumors, and maintaining social media accounts on major platforms. Reactive strategies include considering both action and inaction, responding quickly, considering if additional communication help is needed, denying the false and admitting the truth, being transparent and forthright, self-publishing, communicating with staff, correcting misinformation while avoiding repeating false accusations, crafting key messages using a small number of key points, prioritizing audiences, considering whether to use the CEO or another spokesperson as the organization's face to the media, considering all media as communication options, using news wires, avoiding allowing fake news to distract from maintaining standards, keeping an open line of communication with primary publics, reaching out to media relationships, flooding the market with real news telling positive stories, getting false and defamatory posts removed, and considering legal action.

Keywords: *Fake news; history of fake news; definition of fake news; crisis communication;*

strategic communication; fake news management; public relations; case study; FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency); Comet Ping Pong pizzeria; PizzaGate; Starbucks Company; City of Wood River, Illinois; Planned Parenthood

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Chapter 1. The Prevalence of Fake News

Fake news is not a new phenomenon. Gossip has been around since humans could speak, and false written reports have existed as far back as Procopius's *Secret History*, which discredited Byzantium Emperor Justinian and his wife circa 554 C.E. (Burkhardt 4-5). Colonial Americans first saw fake news in the 1600s when a printer defamed the king of France (Campbell et al. 272). Since then, written fake news has caused many headaches for both the subjects of such news and for the readers looking for truthful accounts of the day's events and issues.

The prominence of fake news has ebbed and flowed through the centuries, rising shortly after each step of media development and falling as forces work to keep it in check (Burkhardt 5-8). The most recent wave began shortly after the Internet was developed and opened to the public (11). The Internet allows information to be shared instantly, and this has been successful in a previously unimaginable way for those wanting to share their stories with others halfway across the world (11). For example, participants in the Arab Spring uprisings in Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia used Twitter as a megaphone to tell the world what was happening in real time as events unfolded (Brown et al.). However, the speed of the Internet also does not discriminate between stories that are true, false, or somewhere in between (Burkhardt 11). "While the existence of fake news is not new, the speed at which it travels and the global reach of the technology that can spread it are unprecedented," says researcher Joanna M. Burkhardt (7).

For a time, society thought the Internet would be a great information equalizer, allowing people from all walks of life to access data about any topic (Burkhardt 11).

> With the birth and spread of the internet, it was thought that a truly democratic and honest means of sharing information had arrived. Control of the content accessible via the internet is difficult (but not impossible), making former information power holders less

> powerful. Anyone with access and a desire to share their thoughts could use the internet to do so. (Burkhardt 11)

And maybe it has been an equalizer. However, this freedom of information has also meant that for the first time anyone can publish inaccurate data or fabricate research studies or news reports and get them in front of audiences to read, watch, or hear (Burkhardt 11).

> The democratization in information allows everyone and anyone to participate and includes information from bad actors, biased viewpoints, ignorant or uninformed opinion—all coming at internet users with the velocity of a fire hose. The glut of information is akin to having no information at all, as true information looks exactly like untrue, biased, and satirical information. (Burkhardt 11)

Making it worse are the social media algorithms, which have created social bubbles for users, stopped them from seeing content the algorithm thinks they would not be likely to engage, and fueled pre-conceived beliefs and ideas (Burkhardt 12).

What may be the pinnacle of this wave of American fake news was brought to the attention of the public in the months preceding the 2016 presidential election (Silverman et al.; Tandoc et al. 147). Conspiracy theorists on both underground social media platforms such as 4Chan and ideological websites like *Infowars* created and led the spread of fabricated stories, including stories claiming Pope Francis endorsed presidential candidate Donald Trump, Trump used his private plane to transport 200 stranded marines, Hillary Clinton sold weapons to ISIS, the FBI director was paid millions of dollars by the Clinton Foundation, Hillary Clinton endorsed Trump in 2013, Comet Ping Pong Pizzeria was the home of a pedophilia ring led by Hillary Clinton, and many of others (Ritchie; LaCapria). When *Buzzfeed News* published an October 2016 report about the high prevalence of fake news on Facebook, the American public took

notice (Silverman, et al.). Making the report even more significant was the news that broke earlier that summer of Russia meddling in the election process through an organized and state-funded disinformation campaign using troll factories, social bots, and fake social media accounts (Ashbrook; Curtis). President Trump and people close to him shared posts from many of these accounts, and at least once President Trump directly thanked one of them for their support (Ashbrook).

In addition to Russian conspirators and American ideological conspiracy theorists, entrepreneurs from the United States and other countries have been creating and disseminating fake news to the U.S. public (Marantz). These entrepreneurs have figured out that they can create content farms, websites with vast amounts of content that cover unlimited topics, that attract readers and advertising revenue (Burkhardt 7-8; Wordsworth; Marantz). To increase traffic to their websites, unscrupulous producers will misappropriate images and context to produce more sensational stories, steal stories from other content producers, or fabricate entire articles (Burkhardt 7-8; Wordsworth; Marantz). Burkhardt expounds:

> Twenty-first-century economic incentives have increased the motivation to supply the public with fake news. The internet is now funded by advertisers rather than by the government. . . . Advertisers will pay a website owner to allow their advertising to be shown, just as they might pay a newspaper publisher to print advertisements in the paper. . . . Using computing power to collect the data, it is possible to count the number of visits and visitors to individual sites. Popular websites attract large numbers of people who visit those sites, making them attractive to advertisers. . . . The fee paid to the website owners by the advertisers rewards website owners for publishing popular information and

provides an incentive to create more content that will attract more people to the site. (Burkhardt 7-8)

Internet users, and especially social media users, are not free from responsibility for the spread of fake news; the organic spread has been tremendous (Allcott and Gentzkow 219). Researchers Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow examined 156 verified-fake articles from leading fact-checking third-parties, all taken from the three months before the 2016 election (219). Then they categorized them as pro-Trump/anti-Clinton or pro-Clinton/anti-Trump and compared how many times they were shared on Facebook (219). They found that fake news was widely shared: 115 pro-Trump stories were shared on Facebook 30 million times, and 41 pro-Clinton stories were shared on Facebook 7.6 million times (212). Allcott and Gentzkow also looked at the rate by which voters were exposed to fake news in the three months leading up to the election and by which those voters remembered it three weeks after the election (212-213, 220). The researchers concluded, accounting for placebo, that about three stories were read per American adult, and the average American adult both saw and remembered 1.14 fake stories (212-213). Additional research showed that 62% of American adults get at least some of their news on social media, making social media an important source of news in today's news media landscape (212). Furthermore, the most popular fake news stories on Facebook were shared more often than the most popular news stories from mainstream news sites (212). Another survey looked at over 3,000 adults after the 2016 U.S. presidential election and found that fake news headlines were both remembered by and fooled American adults about 75 percent of the time (West). This may in part be because people often share news posts of articles without clicking through and reading the article (Burkhardt 12). In fact, according to Chartbeat CEO Tony Haile, 55% of people who clicked on an article post spent fewer than 15 seconds actively on that page

(12). The number of times a message is seen, the medium through which it is broadcasted, the state of mind of the user at the time of the message, the existing beliefs and ideologies of the user, social pressures, and social media algorithms all affect whether or not the message will be believed and shared (West; Ashbrook).

The influence of fake news could have serious consequences for American society, and some argue it already has by dividing America and helping Donald Trump become president (Curtis). Webster University social engineering and digital literacy professor Jim Curtis argues that the margin of victory was so close that only one of every 350 people in Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin would have needed to be swayed by fake news to vote for Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton to sway the election (Curtis). While the exact results of social media influence on the election are unknown and cannot feasibly be determined with certainty, we do know that political fake news has had serious consequences on other organizations. The vicious Pizzagate story led true believers of the story to threaten the lives of the Comet Ping Pong staff members and their families, who were thought to be part of a pedophilia ring, and led Westboro Baptist Church members to picket the pizza parlour while shouting homophobic and racists slurs (Gillin; Hynum and Cray). Planned Parenthood was targeted with a highly edited and misleading video supposedly of one of their doctors admitting that the organization sells aborted baby parts (Groch-Begley and Boguhn). Despite the offending organization releasing a longer video in which the contents contradicted the claims made regarding the short video, the damage led to a nation-wide uproar and several states' legislatures attempting to end financial support of Planned Parenthood's non-abortive healthcare services (Groch-Begley and Boguhn; "DOJ"). Such a move, Planned Parenthood claimed, would have left thousands of low-income people without STD testing and treatment (Groch-Begley and Boguhn; "DOJ").

Other countries have had fake news consequences that have included murder. "India has been plagued by fake news concerning cyclones, public health, and child abuse," says Darrell West of the Brookings Institute (West). "When intertwined with religious or caste issues, the combination can be explosive and lead to violence. People have been killed when false rumors have spread through digital media about child abductions.[16]" (West). Similar violence could happen in the United States and nearly did when an armed Pizzagate true believer stormed the Comic Ping Pong with an assault rifle (Gillin). "This [fake] information can distort election campaigns, affect public perceptions, or shape human emotions," says West (West). "Recent research has found that 'elusive bots could easily infiltrate a population of unaware humans and manipulate them to affect their perception of reality, with unpredictable results'" (West).

It is clear that organizations like those mentioned above need strategies for countering fake news. Yet, many organizations do not have a plan for handling a fake news attack (Dey). By studying how organizations have responded to fake news allegations, one can develop a set of strategies, some proactive and some reactive, for organizations to use in fighting fake news attacks. In the following pages, this paper will provide a literature review of some of the existing information on the creation and spread of fake news; provide a historical foundation of American fake news and today's media landscape; explain how fake news is spread by content creators, social media users, and technology; provide a definition of fake news for everyday discourse; examine how five organizations used communication strategies to fight fake news; provide a literature review of eight articles documenting how professional communicators suggest responding to fake news; and synthesize this research to provide a set of communication strategies with which organizations can fight fake news attacks. Organizations this paper will study include FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency; the City of Wood River,

Illinois; Starbucks Corporation; Planned Parenthood Federation of America; and Comet Ping Pong. Communication professionals, agencies, and researchers whose work will be examined include Hubbell Communications, Eddie Velez of Success by Design; Katie Creaser of Affect Communications and *PR News*, Ellen Hartman of Hartman Public Relations and *Restaurant Informer,* Lisa Arledge Powell of MediaSource and Public Relations Society of America's Health Academy Conference, Nikhail Dey of Genesis Burson-Marsteller and Asia-Pacific Innovation Summit, Gheorge-Ilie Fârte and Daniel-Rareş Obadă of Alexandru Ioan Cuza University Department of Communication Science and Public Relations; and William Benoit of the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Chapter 2. Defining Fake News, Misinformation and Disinformation

The term fake news has been used a lot since the beginning of the primary campaigns for the 2016 U.S. presidential elections (Tandoc et al. 147). However, as demonstrated in a 2018 study by Edson C. Tandoc Jr., Zheng Wei Lim, and Richard Ling, who examined 34 scholarly articles published from 2003 to 2017 in an effort to learn how researchers were using the term, fake news has a multitude of meanings and components (138). Tandoc et al. explain that some people and groups use the term fake news to describe fabricated news, and others it to describe unflattering and unwelcome news (Tandoc et al. 148). Prior to 2016, however, the term was primarily used to describe satires and parodies, such as those presented in *Saturday Night Live* and *The Daily Show with John Stewart* (Tandoc et al. 138, 142; Curtis). What, then, is today's definition of fake news, and what does it look like? Is there a more specific term we can use to describe harmful fake news? Identifying the types of fake news circulating within American media will help to determine the best definition of fake news, to determine if misinformation or an alternate term would be better suited to describe the contemporary problem, and to help understand the different genres by which the American public is barraged with fake news.

Describing Real News

Real news must be defined first in order to define and understand fake news. Merriam-Webster describes news as "a report of recent events," "previously unknown information," "something having a specified influence or effect," "material reported in a newspaper or news periodical or on a newscast," and "matter that is newsworthy" and "interesting enough to the general public to warrant reporting (Merriam-Webster). Research has described news in a myriad of ways, including:

> an account of a recent, interesting, and significant event (Kershner 2005), an account of events that significantly affect people (Richardson 2007) . . . a dramatic account of

> something novel or deviant (Jamieson and Campbell 1997) . . . an output of journalism, a field expected to provide 'independent, reliable, accurate, and comprehensive information' (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2007, 11) . . . expected to report, above all things, the truth (17). (Tandoc et al. 140)

Journalism, a concept closely related to news, is defined by Merriam-Webster as "the collection and editing of news for presentation through the media," "the public press," "an academic study concerned with the collection and editing of news or the management of a news medium," "writing designed for publication in a newspaper or magazine," "writing characterized by a direct presentation of facts or description of events without an attempt at interpretation," and "writing designed to appeal to current popular taste or public interest" (Merriam-Webster). According to the Society for Professional Journalists, which holds its members to a journalistic code of ethics, journalism relies on the presentation of the truth, the minimizing of harm, acting independently, and being transparent ("SPJ Code of Ethics").

Given the above descriptions of news, and as illustrated by the circularity of the definitions of news and journalism, news can be defined as an accurate and transparent account of a real event that is often presented in the style of journalistic news media (Tandoc et al. 140; Merriam-Webster).

Describing Fake News

Researchers have different ways of describing fake news. According to Allcott and Gentzkow, fake news consists of "news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers" (Allcott and Gentzkow 213). Kovic says that fake news is "non-journalistic written text and/or audio-visual material that deliberately mimics a journalistic style in order to achieve some goal" (Kovic). Burkhardt describes fake news as including satire and

parody "meant to amuse or to instruct the unwary," but also notes that "[c]anards and other news that fall into the category of misinformation and misdirection . . . often have more sinister and serious motives" (Burkhardt 7). Wikipedia, the open-source web encyclopedia continuously written and edited by the public, defines fake news as "a type of yellow journalism or propaganda that consists of deliberate misinformation or hoaxes spread via traditional print and broadcast news media or online social media . . . written and published with the intent to mislead in order to damage an agency, entity, or person, and/or gain financially or politically" ("Fake News"). After examining 34 scholarly articles surrounding the use of the term fake news, Tandoc et al. conclude that fake news "appropriates the look and feel of real news; from how websites look; to how articles are written; to how photos include attributions. Fake news hides under a veneer of legitimacy as it takes on some form of credibility by trying to appear like real news" (Tandoc et al. 147).

Types of Fake News

Tandoc and his team differentiate between several types of fake news as described in the research they examined (Tandoc et al. 147). According to their research, there are six categories by which researchers have discussed fake news: satire, parody, fabrication, manipulation, advertising, and propaganda (141). These, they say, can each be categorized along two continuums: facticity, or how truthful and transparent a message is, and intention, meaning the message author's immediate intention to deceive the audience member (147). Expanding on this work, each fake news type can also be classified how transparent the message is in disclaiming who produced the message. Similarly, Zurich Institute of Public Affairs Research writer Marko Kovic identifies five high-level categories of fake news: clickbait, satire, ideological distortion of facts, propaganda, and conspiratorial trolling (Kovic). Some of these categories by Tandoc et al.

and Kovic overlap. There are also at least two ways the term fake news is used by the general public that are not accepted by the scholarly community: flawed journalism and unflattering or unwelcome criticism (Kovic). Each of these types of fake news should be examined.

Satire

Merriam-Webster defines satire in two ways: “a literary work holding up human vices and follies to ridicule or scorn” and “trenchant wit, irony, or sarcasm used to expose and discredit vice or folly” (Merriam-Webster). News satire, then, is satire presented in a news format, including mock news programs which use humor and wit to provide entertainment and political commentary (Merriam-Webster; Tandoc et al. 141). “Their use of humor is not perfunctory; rather, humor is often used to provide critiques of political, economic or social affairs. In essence, they are equal parts of informing and entertaining. . . . the core content of political satires are based on actual events” (Tandoc et al. 141-142).

Comedy Central’s *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* is a strong example of news satire (Noah). In this cable show, Noah and his team of writers and editors use real news media clips and stories, humorous commentary, sarcasm, and small fabrications presented facetiously to provide context for and criticism of today’s real news stories and are certainly meant to provide a critical assessment of current affairs (Noah; Tandoc et al. 141-142). *Saturday Night Live*’s “Weekend Update” is another satirical news program (“Weekend Update”). It uses a format based on nightly broadcast news reports and injects absurdity and outlandish behavior (“Weekend Update”). As it is assumed that the audiences of such programs understand that not all the statement made during the shows are factual and such programs do not attempt to disguise themselves as real news stories, satirical news programs can be categorized as low in facticity but also low in intention to deceive (Tandoc et al. 147-148).

Parody

Related to satire is the parody, which Merriam-Webster describes as “a literary or musical work in which the style of an author or work is closely imitated for comic effect or in ridicule” (Merriam-Webster). Like satire, news parody is meant to entertain with humor (Tandoc et al. 143). News parody may also bright current issues to light (143). However, this is done in a general fashion rather than directly commenting on the issue and uses completely fabricated stories (143).

The Onion is a website famous for its news parody (“Trump Locked Out”). Its stories, such as “Trump Locked Out of White House After Accidentally Revoking Own Security Clearance,” looks and reads like real news (“Trump Locked Out”). The story also alludes to a recent current event, that being President Trump’s revocation of the security clearance of ex-CIA director John Brennan (Hirschfeld Davis and Shear). However, the story, though plausible, is outlandish and not intended to be believed (“Trump Locked Out;” Tandoc et al. 143). Such parody news stories are completely fictional and with the intention to entertain rather than to deceive (Tandoc et al. 147-148). News parodies, therefore, can be categorized as low facticity and low intention to deceive (Tandoc et al. 147-148).

Fabrication

Fabricated news stories are stories that are manufactured to look like, read like, and pass as legitimate news articles (Tandoc et al. 143). They are “articles which have no factual basis but are published in the style of news articles to create legitimacy” (Tandoc et al. 143). While parody aims to entertain, Fabricated news aims to induce audience members to believe the false story (Tandoc et al. 143). “Unlike parody, there is no implicit understanding between the author and

the reader that the item is false. Indeed, the intention is often quite the opposite. The producer of the item often has the intention of misinforming" (Tandoc et al. 143).

One such news story, which gained an added layer of legitimacy when it was shared by Braitberg news, claimed that the reason Target's share priced dropped was a backlash against the company's transgender policies (Tandoc et al. 143). The stock prices did fall, but the reason for the decrease was fabricated; no evidence alluded to the transgender policies linking to the stock price fall (Tandoc et al. 143). Fabricated news stories have a high level of intention to deceive and a low level of facticity (Tandoc et al. 147-148).

Manipulation: Photo Manipulation, Misappropriation, and Ideological Distortion of the Facts

Manipulation of news is the intentional changing of the facts of the story, including the facts of a photograph, video, or other media, in order to change the narrative of the original story (Tandoc et al. 144). Effects of photo manipulation can be innocent, such as color correction, or can be intentionally deceitful, including changing an element or inserting a person into a photograph (Tandoc et al. 144). Sometimes a photo editing choice can be accidentally deceitful, such as unintentionally brightening the color of the sky enough that it looks like a different time of day or weather pattern (Tandoc et al. 144). Of course, the same choice could be made with the intention of making an event look more successful than it was (Tandoc et al. 144).

Another form of deceptive manipulation is appropriation. Appropriation, according to the Merriam-Webster, is the "take[ing] or make[ing] use of without authority or right" (Merriam-Webster). Misappropriation of a news story or fact is the taking of a story or photo out of context in order to change the narrative told (Tandoc et al. 144). In one example, three photos of a group of buses taking people to a conference were shared on Twitter with a caption regarding the buses transporting anti-Trump protesters to an anti-Trump event (145). The photo was then shared to

Reddit and then to Facebook, receiving over 370,000 shares (145). The photograph was not edited, but the story told about the photograph told a narrative that supported conservative's claims that anti-Trump protesters were being supported or paid to join the protest to inflate the numbers at such events (145). Misappropriation, like excessive photo manipulation, can be made unintentionally. However, photo and fact manipulations and misappropriation, which contain no disclaimer, can generally be classified as both low in facticity and high in intention to deceive.

Ideological distortion of the facts involves taking a set of facts and fabricating parts of or misappropriating them, to tell a story that supports an existing ideological viewpoint (Kovic). Ideologically distorted stories have an intent to deceive and a low level of facticity (Kovic; Tandoc et al. 148).

Advertising and Public Relations: Native Advertising and VNRs

Advertising and public relations are intended to market and advocate for an entity and, with an intention to persuade or reinforce attitudes and choices, are one-sided (Tandoc et al. 145). Nonetheless, advertising materials in the guise of genuine news reports as well as to refer to press releases published as news (Tandoc et al. 145). Video news releases are video stories crafted by communications agencies or corporations to look like and be incorporated into real news (Tandoc et al. 145). The news agency to which a VNR is submitted is ultimately responsible for making sure the origin of the video is disclosed (145). However, even footage with disclaimers can be misleading if they are not sufficiently obvious to the viewer (145). "[T]he obscuration of [the VNR's] origins may mislead audiences into believing that the news produced is entirely free of bias" (145). Furthermore, videos which contain disclaimers that are not audible can make the VNR footage origin indeterminable to hard-of-sight audience members.

Native advertising is advertising that aims to achieve both news and marketing goals (Tandoc et al. 146). For example, during the promotion of the Netflix original series *Orange is the New Black*, a story on women's incarceration, the subject of the series, was placed on the website of *The New York Times* (Tandoc et al. 146). The story was factual, albeit one-sided, and looked like a *Times*-made feature; it "it appear[ed] to be a genuine news feature as the content include[d] official sources, statistics, interviews, and scholarly studies" (146). However, a disclaimer identified the story as promoted by Netflix and *Orange is the New Black* (146). Native advertising and video news releases, therefore, have varying levels of facticity and intention to deceive (146).

The third type of fake news advertising is clickbait (Kovic). Clickbait consists of advertising headlines and images designed to look like news headlines and intended to get as many viewers as possible to click the headline or photograph, which are often misappropriated, in order to transfer them to a linked page that contains advertising (Kovic; Tandoc et al. 144). Clickbait can be fabricated, misappropriated facts, or truth, but most have a low level of facticity and some level of intent to deceive (Tandoc et al. 143-145, 147).

Propaganda

According to Merriam-Webster, propaganda is "the spreading of ideas, information, or rumor for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person" or "ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one's cause or to damage an opposing cause" (Merriam-Webster). Tandoc et al. describe propaganda in the news as "news stories which are created by a political entity to influence public perceptions. . . . to benefit a public figure, organization or government" (Tandoc et al. 146). Similarly, Kovic defines fake news as "biased information, typically created and promoted by governments, with the goal of changing attitudes

of the audiences in their favor" (Kovic). Propaganda can be factual or inaccurate but are always biased and intended to promote an end goal (Kovic). "The 'news' that are created are purely a strategic tool intended to achieve some goal. The propositional content of propaganda might be true, but truth is at most a by-product of propaganda. It certainly is not its goal" (Kovic). Propaganda has varying levels of facticity and intent to deceive but is generally classified as having low facticity and a high level of intent to deceive (Tandoc et al. 148)

Conspiratorial Trolling

Trolls are online users who act in "disruptive, mocking, and disrespectful" ways and with the intent of "upsetting other users and derailing civil discourse" (Kovic). Conspiratorial trolls are coordinated "cyber warriors" who promote divisional ideas and conspiracy theories (Kovic; Curtis). Russia has participated in conspiratorial trolling against several nations, including the United States, by hiring people to act as online trolls, create false social media accounts, and spread divisional, anti-Hillary Clinton and pro-Donald Trump messaging (Curtis).

Flawed Journalism and Unflattering Reports and Criticism

There are also two ways people in the general public use the term fake news which researchers do not: flawed news reporting and disliked or unflattering reports (Kovic). Both Tandoc et al. and Kovic notably exclude inaccurate reports and negative criticism as fake news (Tandoc et al. 148; Kovic). According to Kovic:

> There are at least two potential pitfalls of an improper use of the fake news concept. The first pitfall is to label any genuine journalistic content fake news when you do not like what is being reported. This is often the way in which President Trump uses the term fake news. And he is not alone. According to a study published in January 2018, almost one third of US citizens believe that it is appropriate to label factually accurate journalistic

> reporting as "fake news" when some politician of political group one likes is being criticized. The second pitfall of the fake news concept is to classify journalistic work that is flawed as fake news. (Kovic)

Nonetheless, politicians and others continue to use the term fake news to discredit critics and opponents (T. Keith, "President"). For example, before his inauguration, President Trump tweeted about the alleged fake unemployment rates as "a phony number, five percent," and again later, "It's not down to five percent. It's probably 20 or 21 percent. Some people think it's higher" (qtd. in T. Keith, "President"). Post-inauguration, he described the unemployment rate in a positive light, criticizing the "fake news" media for not reporting it enough (T. Keith, "President"). Trump often criticized news media and negative news reports, at least once admitting he calls critics fake: "The Fake News is working overtime. Just reported that, despite the tremendous success we are having with the economy & all things else, 91% of the Network News about me is negative (Fake). Why do we work so hard in working with the media when it is corrupt? Take away credentials?" (qtd. in T. Keith, "President"). Other U.S. and world politicians and public figures have followed Trump's lead. Facing possible impeachment, Missouri Governor Eric Greitens called the sexual assault allegations against him fake news, as did foreign soccer star Cristiano Ronaldo when faced with allegations of a rape he admitted to years earlier (Stancy Correll; Vega). Followers of these and other influencers also discredit such unwelcome reports as fake news (Kovic).

How to Talk About Fake News in Public Discourse: Fake News and Disinformation

As different types of media previously labeled as fake news have greatly different levels of facticity and intent to deceive, the best definition of fake news for today's discourse must, therefore, take facticity and intent to deceive into account. The term fake news now rarely

applies to satire and parody, which aim to entertain and provide commentary rather than passing as journalistic reporting. The exception to satire and parody as falling outside of fake news is when it is presented in such a way that could be easily mistaken for real news, such as when posted out of context on social media. Journalistic news is expected to be factual and has easily identifiable formats, increasing the expectation that reports presented like journalism are factual. Therefore, a good definition of fake news for scholarly and critical public discourse is an account of an event, presented in a style expected of journalistic news media, which is both low in facticity and high in immediate intention to deceive.

However, because fabricated facts are often casually described as fake news and because powerful influencers and their followers insist on using the term fake news to discredit critics, one cannot assume a given speaker is using this or any other particular definition of fake news. The term can mean practically anything depending on the speaker. This has led some to argue that the term fake news means nothing. When fake news means everything then it means nothing, argues Erik Wemple, media critic for the *Washington Post* (Wemple). Yet, this is not the case. Just as the term tea can be used specifically to describe steeped leaves from the *Camellia Sinensis* plant or to describe any infusion of leaves, herbs, and fruit in water, fake news can effectively have multiple uses ("What Is the Difference").

For critical public discourse, a more specific term is needed to describe reports that are low in facticity. Wardle distinguishes between two types of low-facticity reports: misinformation and disinformation (Wardle). Misinformation is information that is unintentionally false (Wardle). Disinformation, on the other hand, is "the deliberate creation and sharing of information known to be false" (Wardle). Therefore, inaccurate rumors and news reporting are misinformation, and intentionally misleading, malicious, and conspiratorial reports are

disinformation (Tandoc et al. 140; Wardle). Fake news is best used as an umbrella term for untrue reports, and it should be avoided as a description for anything truthful mostly true.

The remainder of this paper uses each of the terms, fake news, misinformation, and disinformation, as appropriate. Fake news is used as a catch-all for all types of false information, including misinformation, disinformation, satire, parody, misappropriation, fabrication, et cetera. For example, due to the historical multitude of ways the term fake news has been used, the examination of the history of fake news will use the term fake news and will include all the types of fake news described in this chapter. However, chapters that examine how organizations and professionals handle multiple types of false news use the term fake news except in cases when discussing a particular type of fake news; in these cases, a more specific term is needed for clarification. Disinformation is used to describe the conspiratorial trolling campaigns maliciously used by actors, such as Russia and the opponents of Hillary Clinton, malicious and purposeful ideological false news published by individuals, and other intentionally and patently false reports. Misinformation is used in reference to unintentionally false information that, nonetheless, spreads through media. The communication strategies suggested in the last chapter can be used for fighting both misinformation and disinformation targeted at organizations.

Chapter 3. History of American Fake News: The Colonial Press through the Broadcast Era

America has a long tradition of freedom of the press, starting before the American colonies declared independence from England when, in 1735, a colonial American jury acquitted American printer Peter Zenger of seditious libel (Gorbach 237; "History of Newspapers;" "Declaration of Independence"). The charge was brought against him when his paper, *The New York Weekly Journal*, criticized the local appointed colonial governor, William Cosby ("History of Newspapers"). The case became a political win for freedom of the press and, later, a basis for the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution ("History of Newspapers"). However, freedom of the press and prosecuting libel and slander only after it has been published allows for another type of news to potentially thrive: fake news. In examining American media, one can identify at least five periods of fake news in American history, including the Early American and Partisan Press Era, the Penny Press Era, the Era of Yellow Journalism, the Broadcast Era; and the Internet Era, including the Post-Factual sub-era ("History of Newspapers;" Gorbach 242-247; Campbell et al. 272-273; Burkhardt 7, 11). Each can help provide a foundation for understanding the fake news situation America faces today, post-2016 presidential campaign (Vendantam).

Early American and Partisan Press Era

Creating pamphlets and books was a slow and expensive undertaking prior to the development of Gutenberg's movable-type printing press in 1440 ("History of Newspapers"). By the first half of the 1600s, after the movable-type press had become commonly used, weekly and daily newspapers and pamphlets had popped up all over Europe ("History of Newspapers"). In 1690, a man named Benjamin Harris began the first North American newspaper, which he called *Publick Occurrences, Both Foreign and Domestick* (Campbell et al. 272). He claimed that his paper would be completely truthful (Vendantam). Then, in his first issue, he printed a story

claiming that the King of France was sleeping with his son's wife (Campbell et al. 272). As the king didn't have a daughter-in-law, a fact Harris likely knew, and as Harris was a Protestant telling a story about a Roman Catholic king during a time of religious tension, the story was likely a fabrication intended to undermine the French king (Vedantam). The newspaper was shut down immediately (Vedantam). This story was the first known instance of fake news to be printed in an American newspaper (Vedantam).

The first paper to succeed in the American Colonies was the *Boston News-Letter*, published by John Campbell (Campbell et al. 272). The *News-Letter*, like most colonial newspapers, was not very timely; it took weeks for news to travel from one part of the colonies to another and months to cross the seas (272). As more newspapers opened in America, two main types developed (Campbell et al. 273). The Partisan Press included papers that supported, and were supported by, a political party (Campbell et al. 273; Vendantam). The Commercial Press focused on economic issues and served business leaders (Campbell et al. 273). Occasionally, another type of newspaper arose, such as James Franklin's *New England Courant,* started in 1721 (272). The *Courant* began the tradition of printing stories for the average colonist rather than for business and political leaders (272). James Franklin's brother, Benjamin, also bucked trends with his *Pennsylvania Gazette,* which he took over in 1729 and which made money from advertising in addition to a political party (272). Benjamin Franklin also printed fake stories (Gorbach 238). In 1730, Franklin published a piece called "Witch Trial at Mount Holly" in the Pennsylvania Gazette (238). In this satirical piece commenting on the superstitions surrounding witchcraft, Franklin described "dancing sheep and Psalm-singing hogs" (238). In another piece, under the fake identity of the poor scholar Richard Saunders, Franklin described the death of Titan Leeds, a real-life and rival almanac editor (239-240). While Leeds was stuck defending his

status as a living person, Franklin reaped the high sales of his Poor Richard's Almanack (239-240).

Penny Press Era

By 1820, the average newspaper cost 6 cents apiece and was sold through a yearly subscription (Campbell et al. 274). This meant the cost of written news was a price beyond the means of the working man; being well-informed was a privilege afforded only the elite (Campbell et al. 274; "History of Newspapers"). Additionally, newspapers had no reporters; a single editor decided what stories to include and write (Vendantam).

A man named Benjamin Day had an idea for a different kind of business model (272). In 1833, Day founded the *New York Sun*, a newspaper that relied on advertisers and daily sales to profit (Standage; Gorbach 237), He set his newspaper price at 1 cent, making news affordable to almost everyone (237). He also made a point to print news that the everyman would like, with a strong focus on human-interest stories (237). The opening of the *Sun* was followed by the opening of more penny press papers, as this modern type of newspaper was dubbed (Campbell et al. 272). This included James Gordon Bennett's *New York Morning Herald* in 1835 (272). Bennett's *Herald* was the first to employ reporters to cover events and write stories (272).

The penny press newspapers depended on day-to-day sales, and, in their early years, pursued those sales at the cost of truth (Standage). One of the most famous and believed news hoaxes in history came from these early penny press papers (237). In 1835, the *Sun's* Richard Adams Locke published a series of six stories reporting on the findings of John Herschel, a prominent British astronomer who was studying in South Africa (Standage). Herschel, the articles claimed, used a powerful telescope to look at the moon and saw giant man-bats who collected and ate fruit and held conversations, "goat-like creatures with blue skin," and a

sapphire temple (Standage). The stories, of course, were completely fabricated; however, no one would know that for months, as that was how long it would take for anyone to verify the story by mail (Standage). The circulation of the *Sun* more than doubled, making it the world's bestselling daily paper (Standage). "The rival and more respectable six-cent papers were embarrassed," says communications scholar Julien Gorbach, "and rushed to catch up with the important story, reprinting it without crediting the original. European news papers picked up the news as well, thus exciting and deceiving 'almost the whole reading world'" (240).

Other stories were not meant to deceive in the same sense as the Moon Hoax, but rather to fill in holes and make stories more interesting, such as when a reporter for the New York Tribune wrote an article about his observations of the 1862 Civil War battle of Pea Ridge/Elkhorn Tavern, Arkansas (Vendantam; History.com, "Battle of Pea Ridge"). The reporter hadn't made it to the battle in time to see the action, so he used what he could learn about the Battle of Pea Ridge and what he knew about other Civil War battles to report on what he thought probably happened (Vedantam). Such embellishment was commonplace and accepted as good practice among editors and reporters on the time (Vendantam). If you didn't have the details about a story, a reporter could choose not to write about the scoop or they could imagine the details (Vendantam). The latter, they argued, was in the public good because "nobody wants a newspaper to be a mathematical treatise. Fake news, or 'faking of news,' was something that journalists could do to make their readers happy. . . . to do a higher truth," says Tucher (Vendantam).

A third type of fake story of the Penny Press era resulted from both embellishments and fact appropriation (Vendantam). Penny press papers, in general, pitched that they were free to print what they wanted because they weren't tied to a political party (Vendantam). To gain a

share of the market, however, they often selected and catered to a specific audience (Vendantam). Bennett's *New York Herald*, for example, wanted respectable middle-class readers (Vendantam). Day's *New York Sun* wanted working-class readers (Vendantam). Each paper told their stories and embellish details in ways that would appeal to their audiences (Vendantam). When, in 1936, a prostitute was found hacked to death and burned in her bed, the two papers told very different stories (Vendantam). According to the *Herald*, the "nice middle-class young man" who was accused was actually innocent, "a lamb being framed" by seductresses (Vendantam). The *Sun* told a story of a poor woman "on the fringe of society" was being abused by the elites, the rich and powerful (Vendantam). Therefore, the newspapers were telling their audiences what they thought their readers wanted to hear and then letting readers choose which story versions they wanted (Vedantam).

Yellow Journalism Era

Fabrication on the scale of the Moon Hoax was tempered, if only for a time, as rival papers outed the others' fictional stories (Standage). Instead, editors began focusing intensely on the details of true-crime and other juicy stories (Standage). ". . . [A]n infinite supply of genuine human drama could be found by sending reporters to the courts and police stations to write true-crime stories – a far more sustainable model" (Standage). Two famous editors of such papers were Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst (Campbell et al. 272). Pulitzer created the "sex and sin" *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* from a buy-out and merger in 1878 and then acquired the *New York World* in 1883 (272). Meanwhile, Hearst ran the *San Francisco Examiner*, of which he took control in 1887 (272). At first, Pulitzer sold papers through novel stunts, such as the *New York World* sending reporter Nellie Bly around the world in 72 days, eight days less than the main character in Jules Vernes' popular novel *Around the World in Eighty Days* (Campbell et al.

277). Other news stories were investigative journalism pieces aimed at uncovering dirt and injustices, crusading for the common man and woman (277). In 1887, before her trip around the world gained her notoriety, Bly went undercover to investigate the Women's Lunatic Asylum on Blackwell Island, pretending to be insane and getting herself committed (477-478). The *New York World* then printed the two-part story documenting her stunt and the condition and treatment of inmate patients, exposing an inhumane system and spurring the city of New York to commit vast sums of money to clean up the asylums system (477-478).

Then, in 1895, William Randolph Hearst purchased the *New York Journal* and raided Pulitzer's *New York World* for talent (Campbell et al. 272; donaldomahony). To follow was a commercial battle over readership and an era that would soon be called the Era of Yellow Journalism (Campbell et al. 272; donaldomahony). They embellished stories to make them more interesting, making up details to fill holes in reporting, and sometimes completely fabricated interviews, photos, or whatever else it took to sell papers (Campbell et al. 277).

The year 1895 also led to the Cuban struggle for independence from Spain, and the rumor of war sent Hearst's and Pulitzer's reporters scrambling to cover it (History.com, "Spanish-American War"). Hearst's artist, however, finding no threat of war, telegraphed Hearst to report his findings (donaldomahony). "You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war," Hearst replied (donaldomahony). A few years later, the USS Maine, a ship sent to Havana Harbor to protect U.S. citizens and property in the wake of anti-Spanish rioting, exploded with no explanation as to its cause (History.com, "Spanish-American War"). The lack of facts did not stop Hearst's and Pulitzer's teams from explaining the sinking (donaldomahony). Pulitzer's *New York World* soon ran a story about the USS Maine being attacked by enemy torpedo; a photo depicting a violent explosion accompanied the story (donaldomahony). Hearst's *New York Journal* also claimed the

sinking was from an enemy attack (donaldomahony). Hearst's team, however, added an announcement of a $50,000 reward to anyone with information on the attack (donaldomahony). This was an empty promise, of course, because there was no evidence that the ship exploded because of an attack (donaldomahony). "The modern editor of the popular journal does not care for facts," Hearst is quoted as saying; "The editor wants novelty. The editor has no objection to facts if they are also novel. But he would prefer a novelty that is not a fact to a fact that is not a novelty" (Campbell et al. 277).

Hearst and Pulitzer were not the only fabricators of news of the Spanish-American War. Thomas Edison wanted to make motion picture news of what was happening in Cuba (Vendantam). However, his videography equipment was so primitive that it couldn't capture the action (Vendantam). Instead, Edison staged the battles in the mountains of West Orange, New Jersey, and passed them off as being filmed in Cuba (Vendantam).

The general state of the news was so sensational at the time that people began discrediting all news (Vendantam). People began thinking of the press as incapable of telling the truth, explains journalism and fake news scholar Andie Tucher (Vendantam). News fakery, as it was called, became so common that journalists were also slinging it at rivals to discredit them, hoping to thus pick up some of their readership (Vendantam). Ida B. Wells was "a crusading journalist who was exposing, fearlessly, the epidemic of lynching in the South," says Tucher (Vendantam). After Wells published a particularly gruesome story about the lynching of women and children, the *Atlanta Constitution*, a very influential paper for the white South, said in a headline that Wells' work on lynching was no more than "fake news" (Vendantam). Such accusations, believed by those who wanted to believe it, made it very difficult to discuss the situation in public, says Tucher (Vedantam).

By the end of the 1900s, many people had lost faith in the news (Vendantam). Then, in 1896, a man named Adolph Ochs acquired the *New York Times* with the intention of transforming the paper into one that would help counter-act yellow journalism, a paper that would be trustworthy, “decent,” and “not soil the breakfast cloth” (Campbell et al. 278-279). With the lowering of the paper’s price to 1 cent to match the less credible yellow papers, which Ochs believed were read primarily for their prices rather than their stories, Ochs’s *New York Times* helped bring objectivity and accuracy back into vogue as a news value (Campbell et al. 279; Vendantam).

Broadcast Era

When voice broadcast was introduced to the public in 1910, when Lee De Forest broadcast a performance of the Metropolitan Opera to his friends in the New York area with wireless receivers, innovators quickly saw a multitude of uses (Campbell et al. 155). A few years after the demonstration, Frank Conrad, an engineer for Westinghouse, broadcast phonograph recordings of music and news on the experimental radio station 8XK (Campbell et al. 157). By 1920, Westinghouse had seen the potential for stations such as Conrad’s to be used as a mass medium, and the company set up the first commercial radio station, KDKA, with the intention to broadcast to the masses (157). KDKA aired the first professional broadcast that year, the national returns from the Cox-Harding election (157). In the coming years, radio flourished. By 1925, 5.5 million radio sets had been sold (158). Station producers at first took news directly from newspapers, but soon began taking an interpretive role to news (281). Stations also began creating entertainment radiocasts, throughout the late 1920s and 1930s, radio programs included news, music, soap operas, comedy-variety shows, quiz shows, and advertisements (155, 161).

Radio brought a new type of fake news: the fake news broadcast. Orson Welles' *War of the Worlds* was a fictional radio drama about a Martian invasion that imitated the style of a news report with its use of broadcast announcers and eye-witness reports (Campbell et al. 164-165). A disclaimer preceded the science-fiction production; however, to those that missed the introduction, the drama unfolding sounded real (164-165). Panic ensued, especially in New Jersey, where the drama took place, and surrounding states (164-165). Men reported to sign up for the National Guard to repel the attack, people moved around with wet towels on their heads to protect from Martian heat rays, and property owners barricaded buildings and stood guard with guns (164-165). The radio show news was fictional, fake, and not intended to be believed (164-165). Nonetheless, it mirrored newscasts, using the same elements and styles (164-165). Soon after the production, the FCC put into place regulations requiring stricter disclaimers before, after, and during such news-mimicking productions. (164-165).

While radio was flourishing, the television was being developed (Campbell et al. 190). Philo Farnsworth gave his first demonstration of television in 1934; cable was born when the first community antenna television system, CATV, was constructed in the late 1940s; color television was developed in the early 1950s; and TELSTAR, the first television satellite network, was launched in 1960 (190). In 1948, 1% of households had purchased a television set (189). By 1953, that number had jumped to over 50% of households (189).

Unlike radio, television was immediately a commercial endeavor; producers were quick to adopt the same programs and advertisers of radio, sweeping away many of its stars, sponsors and evening audiences (Campbell et al. 157, 165, 190). Like with radio, fake news appeared on air (197). This time, though, the fictional news appeared as regular programming. In October of 1975, *NBC's Saturday Night* premiered as a sketch comedy program featuring guest hosts,

musical guests, and parodies of current events and politics (History.com, "Saturday Night Live Debuts;" "Saturday Night"). One recurring sketch in particular, "Weekend Update," used common news tropes, such as the bantering news anchors, to parody both the news media and events from the past week ("Saturday Night Live: Season 1;" History.com, "Saturday Night Live;" "Weekend Update"). *Saturday Night Liv*e, as it was later renamed, spurred the popularity of fake news entertainment shows, including satirical news and news analysis shows *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report,* and *The Nightly Show* on Comedy Central and *Last Week Tonight* on HBO (History.com, "Saturday Night Live;" "Daily Show;" "Colbert Report;" "Nightly Show;" "Last Week;" Campbell et al. 197). These television programs each mimic journalistic work in one or more ways, yet they are entertainment not meant to be taken at face value (Kovic). Nonetheless, researcher Kovic says, "Just because we might regard the goals of news satire as desirable does not change the *modus operandi*" (Kovic).

Internet Era

Before TELSTAR launched in 1960, the Russians launched the Sputnik satellite into space, orbiting the Earth and, therefore, crossing the skies above the United States (Campbell et al. 190; History.com, "Invention"). In the midst of the Cold War, the launch of Sputnik implied imminent threat (History.com, "Invention"). Within the next few years, and with an added focus on STEM education and innovation, the government added both NASA, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and ARPA, the Department of Defense's Advanced Research Projects Agency, and launched TELSTAR (History.com, "Invention;" Campbell et al. 190). The scientific and military communities were also concerned about a complete failure of communications if Russia succeeded in attacking the phone system (History.com, "Invention"). In 1962, an ARPA and M.I.T. scientist proposed a "'galactic network' of computers that could

talk to one another," thus allowing military and government leaders communicated without the telephone system (History.com, “Invention”). Within two years, another M.I.T. scientists had developed packet switching, a way of breaking down data into pieces, or packets, and then sending this data from one computer to another (History.com, “Invention”). Applied to the computer network, dubbed ARPAnet, packet switching made the computer network less vulnerable than the phone network (History.com, “Invention”). By 1969, ARPAnet delivered its first message (History.com, “Invention”). As the network grew over the next decade, it became increasingly difficult for smooth inter-network communication (History.com, “Invention”). A computer scientist developed Transmission Control Protocol and Internet Protocol, or TCP/IP, that allowed computers, upon request, to easily be introduced to one another (History.com, “Invention”). This paved the way for the introduction of the World Wide Web in 1991, an Internet use design that allowed anyone to retrieve data from a virtual space rather than being limited to transferring files from computer A to computer B (History.com, “Invention”). The following year, the United States government opened the Web for use beyond military and university installations (History.com, “Invention”). Coupled with the development of Mosaic, a layman friendly application for browsing through information on the Web, later renamed Netscape, the Internet was opened to the general population (History.com, “Invention”). Today, the Internet, once relegated to scientists and leaders from military outposts and research universities, is used regularly by nearly a third of the world's 6.8 billion people (History.com, “Invention”).

Chapter 4. The History and Spread of Fake News: The Internet Era

Websites

Before the expansion of the Internet in 1992, it was somewhat difficult to create and share information to mass audiences, often requiring access to some sort of official, and presumably credible, publisher (Peterson). Post opening of the Internet, the "democratization of information" meant that anyone could publish truth or fiction and claim it as fact (Burkhardt 11). Fake websites popped up and their information quickly spread by email.

> "In the late twentieth century, the internet provided new means for disseminating fake news on a vastly increased scale. When the internet was made publicly available, it was possible for anyone who had a computer to access it. At the same time, innovations in computers made them affordable to the average person. Making information available on the internet became a new way to promote products as well as make information available to everyone almost instantly. . . . Some fake websites were created in the early years of generalized web use. Some of these hoax websites were satire. Others were meant to mislead or deliberately spread biased or fake news." (Burkhardt 6-7)

These sites, which often didn't have sources or disclosure of the publishers, had the built-in appearance of credibility pre-earned by established print media (Burkhardt 7).

City-mankato.us was a website used to spread misleading information about the city of Mankato Minnesota (Burkhardt 7). While its intentions appeared to be humorous, many believed the information presented was real (Burkhardt 7). MartinLutherKing.org was created by the white supremacist group Stormfront, although that fact was not disclosed, to discredit the racial and civil justice work of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Burkhardt 7). The .org domain extension lent the website extra credibility (7). The website has since been shut down (7). "Feline Reactions to

Bearded Men" was a fake, parody research study published online which mimicked the formatting and elements of a peer-reviewed research study; only in the bibliography of the study did the piece reveal itself as a hoax through the use of the names of famous entertainers as authors of cited stories originating from journals with not-quite-believable names (Burkhardt 7). DHMO.org was a website that claimed that the compound DHMO, or dihydrogen monoxide, was found in just about everything and linked to cancer, acid rain and global warming (Burkhardt 7). While the website looked as if it was legitimate and presented serious, evidence-backed findings, the website was in actuality an elaborate satirical comment on both biased science and believing what one reads without healthy skepticism; dihydrogen monoxide, also written as dihydrogen oxide and H_20, is a chemical name for water (Burkhardt 7).

Social Media

The most recent evolution of fake news was brought with the developments of social media (Burkhardt 7-8, 12). According to Kaplan and Haenlein, social media is "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technical foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (qtd. in Dijck 4). The predecessors of social media were developed in 1973 at the University of Illinois as part of the university's online network, PLATO ("Timeline of Social Media"). Talkomatic, the PLATO chat application, was probably the first chat room application that allowed multiple users to talk to each other ("Timeline of Social Media"). TERM-Talk was a PLATO instant-messaging app that allowed a user to talk to another user in real-time ("Timeline of Social Media"). PLATO Notes was the first bulletin board system and allowed a poster to share information with the entire network ("Timeline of Social Media"). These technologies further developed and were adopted for commercial use when the Internet was opened to the public ("Timeline of Social Media;"

History.com, "Invention"). Four years later, in 1996, ICQ, the first commercial instant messaging app, launched ("Timeline of Social Media"). This was followed by social blogging in 1998 when Open Diary launched with the abilities to leave reader comments and post friends-only content ("Timeline of Social Media"). In between the two, however, in 1997, came what historians generally agree was the first Web 2.0-based social media website: Six Degree ("Timeline of Social Media"). Based on the idea that everyone in the world is connected to each other within six degrees, this website allowed users to create profiles and friend each other ("Timeline of Social Media"). Friendster, the first well-known social media site, wouldn't launch until 2002 ("Timeline of Social Media"). To follow were the launches of a series of social media sites, many catering to unique segments of the market, including MySpace in 2003; the college-exclusive Facebook in 2004; YouTube video sharing in 2005; Twitter and its 140-character limit in 2006; Tumblr in 2007; Justin.tv, later Twitch.tv, in 2007; Pinterest and its image bookmarking in 2010; Google+ in 2011; Snapchat with its disappearing posts in 2011; Tinder and "swipe left, swipe right" dating in 2012; Periscope live streaming in 2015; and Discord and its IM/VoIP chatrooms in 2015, among others ("Timeline of Social Media").

Social Media Algorithms

In addition to Twitter launching, another social media company changed the online landscape in 2006 ("Timeline of Social Media"). Facebook users could already share their favorite books, movies, political ideologies, religions, and anything else on their profile pages ("Timeline of Facebook"). Starting in 2006 with a move used only by the new platform Twitter, Facebook users would see a list of updates from their friends on their homepage, a page now called the News Feed (Sanghvi; "Timeline of Facebook"). A year later, 2007, Facebook introduced the algorithm curation of posts ("Timeline of Facebook). For the first time, users

could look at their feed, mark a post as something they liked or “x” something they did not want to see, and then an algorithm, a mathematical equation, would automatically respond by showing users more or less of that type of post (“Timeline of Facebook;” Burkhardt 12). This would end up blocking users from content which the algorithm believes the users would be unlikely to like and engage (“Timeline of Facebook;”). The change to the new News Feed would show users posts that were more relevant and interesting to them on their homepage, but it would also introduce the echo chamber effect (Curtis; Burkhardt 12). As the algorithm learned user preferences, it would end up insulating users from opinions and ideas different from their own (Burkhardt 12). The artificially agreeable social media communities in which users found themselves would also bolster users’ existing beliefs and make it appear as if more people agreed with them than in reality (12). It creates an “information bubble that makes it appear that the likes of the group inside the bubble represent the likes of the majority of people (because the group inside the bubble never sees anything contrary to its preferences)" says Burkhardt (12). The algorithm and user preferences create an environment of homophily where “birds of a feather flock together” and create an echo chamber where users hear a lot of things with which they agree and few things, if any, with which they disagree (Curtis; Ashbrook).

Internet Advertising

Around the same time as the algorithm was introduced, Facebook launched Facebook Ads and Beacon (Sanghvi; “Facebook Unveils”). Facebook Ads would allow the Facebook algorithm to convert mined user preferences, likes, and engagements into data for targeted advertising (“Facebook Unveils;” “Timeline of Facebook”). Beacon would allow mined data from outside websites to be sent to Facebook, also for use in targeted advertising (“Timeline of

Facebook"). Political and ideological paid ads could now tap into the echo by pushing outside-of-algorithm posts to targeted, like-minded users' feeds ("Facebook Unveils").

Facebook Ads was modeled the same way as popular Internet search engines' advertising platforms, including Google Adwords and DoubleClick, which began appearing on the Internet scene in the mid-1990s; AdWords launched in 2002 (Sweney; Hamm-Greenawalt). These online advertising platforms are networks that make it easy for an advertiser to appear on a variety of targeted and popular websites by approaching one company, such as DoubleClick, without having to broker deals with thousands of individual websites (Hamm-Greenawalt). These networks are based on a pay-per-click model where advertisers pay each time a user clicks on the digital ad (Sweney; Hamm-Greenawalt). Alternately, advertisers can choose a pay-per-view model (Hamm-Greenawalt). "Ad networks charge advertisers a commission on advertising sales, or on a pay-per-click basis (measured by CPM, or cost per thousand). The cost [for advertising] varies depending on how many eyeballs see an ad and the type of Web site on which the ad appears," wrote Lisa Hamm-Greenawalt in a 1999 article for *Internet World* (Hamm-Greenawalt). Website publishers sign up with the advertising network's company to get ads placed on their website (Hamm-Greenawalt). The website publisher then gets a portion of the ad network's cut when the ad is viewed or clicked (Hamm-Greenawalt). "For Web publishers, it's all about getting ads" (Hamm-Greenawalt). Thus, the online advertising systems created an incentive for website managers to attract as many visits as possible (Burkhardt 7-8; Wordsworth).

A Monetary Incentive for Clickbait and Fake News

Companies want their ads seen and thus prefer to advertise on popular websites (Burkhardt 7-8). The more views a webpage receives and the more popular a website, the more

that website's producer is paid (Burkhardt 7-8; Wordsworth; Marantz). Eventually, entrepreneurs figured out that they could create content farms, websites with vast amounts of content that cover unlimited topics, that attract vast numbers of readers and the corresponding advertising revenue (Burkhardt 7-8; Wordsworth; Marantz). To increase traffic to their websites, unscrupulous producers began misappropriating images and context to produce more sensational stories, steal stories from other content producers, or fabricate entire articles (Burkhardt 7-8; Wordsworth; Marantz). This clickbait can earn good money for its producers, incentivizing the creation of more of the highest-earning content (Marantz; Wordsworth). Andrew Marantz interviewed Emerson Spartz, the "King of Clickbait" and the head of a content mill, for *The New Yorker* (Marantz). To create a viral story, Spartz and his engineers would first use algorithms to crawl the Web for existing stories starting to gain momentum (Marantz). Once they found such a story, they would repackage it, give it a catchier headline, publish it on one of Spartz's websites, and share it on social media (Marantz). He described the process used for creating a story for one of Spartz's many websites:

> [Spartz] added, "The sources and the rules sound simple, but it takes a lot of experimentation to make it actually useful. It's a lot of indicators weighed against each other, and they're always changing." If an image is popular on Reddit but relatively stagnant on Pinterest, for example, Spartz's algorithm might pass it up in favor of something more likely to appeal . . . (Marantz)

Winston Wordsworth, an aspiring journalist and a former clickbait writer for an undisclosed content mill, admitted that sometimes the writers, under pressure to produce viral hits, would fabricate stories entirely (Wordsworth).

> . . .the digits on the wall are getting dangerously low. The advertisers won't like this, our boss will say. "F[***] it, let's make it up," a colleague splutters. A salacious piece of fiction about a man's love life soon materializes. It is published, causing the figures to shoot up at the speed of an electrical jolt. It went super viral and the next day was being covered by mainstream news outlets all over the world . . . (Wordsworth)

Social Bots

Along with the development of clickbait and social media came the development of social bots. Bots, or software robots, are automated bits of software that can do anything a person can do (Ashbrook; Ferrara et al. 96). Primitive bots could do one thing: retweet content (Ferrara et al. 99). Modern bots are much more sophisticated. They can create social media accounts, generate credible personas from web content, find pre-programmed types of content on the web and share it, comment on others' posts, have simple conversations with social media users, and vary their posting pattern to mimic humans' circadian rhythms (99). If a marketer wants to promote a product or a clickbait publisher wants to spread a story faster, they can rent bots to re-post marketing content (Cox). Reposts provide links that both solicit clicks and provide backlinks that help increase search engine ranking ("SEO"). Marketers can also use bots to boost the following of their social media account (Ferrara et al. 103).

Fox News

The Internet Era also ushered in changes offline, including how news organizations present the news. "In the 1960s and 70s, people of all political stripes generally got their news from the same newspapers, magazines, and broadcasts," explains fake news educator Stephen Currie (Currie 44). Back then, only the rare publication was seen as biased, such as the conservative *Chicago Tribune*; most were seen as balanced (44). Journalism was viewed as a

service to the public good, and journalists served as gatekeepers of facts while keeping fake news mostly at bay (44). Since Internet blogs and social media developed, however, everyone has their own publishing platform (44). It's now impossible for everyone publishing facts and opinions to fact-check them with the scrutiny of the traditional news media (Currie 44).

A second powerful force forever changed the news landscape. In October of 1996, as an alternative to the 24-hour news channel CNN and what was seen as the liberal media, Rupert Murdoch founded the conservative Fox News, placing Roger Ailes to lead as CEO (McCarthy and Farhi). Ailes added flashier graphics, more grabbing headlines, a news ticker, a faster-paced overall tone, and a team of mostly conservative reporters and contributors (McCarthy and Farhi). With a philosophy that the news should double as entertainment, Ailes took a different approach with his news reporters and anchors, turning them into entertainment personalities and encouraging them to show emotion (McCarthy and Farhi). Ailes, in contrast to other major networks, broadcast news during the day and opinionated talk programs during prime time, when the most people would watch (McCarthy and Farhi). As news sales across the country declined, Murdoch and Ailes had found a way to flourish (McCarthy and Farhi). Other media networks saw Fox's success with an implied political persuasion and copied its formula, turning MSNBC into a favorite among left-leaning viewers (McCarthy and Farhi).

As a result of Fox News' impact on broadcast news, mainstream news sources often tell the facts of a story but then draw biased conclusions (Harris 31-32). Harris elaborates:

> The line between information and opinion becomes blurry. Viewers and listeners are being told what to think. This is not truly fake news. But if people only hear one side of an issue, they are more likely to believe false reports about the other side. Their views

> become skewed because of what they have heard. It then becomes easier to believe fake news stories. (Harris 31-32)

As headlines from both hard news reports and opinionated news analysis programs are shared and spread through the carbonated world of the World Wide Web, the bubbles in social media and the biases presented by media such as Fox and MSNBC react in a way that compounds the depth and effectiveness of the online echo chambers (Curtis). This has primed Americans for accepting fake news stories, making them more likely to believe and share false stories (Ashbrook). This is what happened in the lead-up to the 2016 U.S. presidential election (Curtis).

Chapter 5. The History and Spread of Fake News: The 2016 Election

In an effort to sow discord in the United States as part of a larger, orchestrated effort to gain world influence, the Russian government took advantage of both human nature and the lightning-fast speed of social media and its echo chambers to spread fake news to those most likely to believe it (Curtis). In June 2017, Bill Priestap, the FBI's counterintelligence official, said that Russia "used fake news and propaganda" and "online amplifiers to spread the information to as many people as possible" and attacked the U.S. election on a "scale and aggressiveness" previously unseen (qtd. in Lardner and Riechmann). These "amplifiers" included bots like the ones mentioned in the last chapter (Lardner and Riechmann; Curtis). ". . . what we're concerned with today, I think, is social media bots that are used to create profiles on social media or to automate profiles on sites like Twitter and Facebook. . . . it can mimic a real person. It can be used to do anything that a person would do on social media. But I think one important thing to remember is there is always a person behind a bot," says Sam Woolley, director of research of the Computational Propaganda Project at Oxford Internet Institute at the University of Oxford (Ashbrook).

On Facebook and Instagram, around 11.4 million people saw 3,000 Russian-paid ads related to the Russian Internet Research Agency from June 2015 to August 2017, reported Facebook, 95% of which were on the Facebook platform and 46% of which were shown before the November 8, 2016, election (Stretch; Schrage). Additionally, 120 Facebook pages were set up posting more than 80,000 posts (Stretch). Accounting for shares and likes, these amounted to an estimated 126 million people seeing Russian-sponsored posts (Stretch). These numbers don't include Twitter or many other social media channels. These numbers are important because fake news often takes the form of organic or promoted social media posts containing opinions of fake people and organizations (Curtis). These posts can be difficult for both less-educated and well-

educated people to identify as deceptive (Curtis). This is particularly true if the message reinforces an existing belief or sentiment, an idea known as confirmation bias (Curtis). The theory of confirmation bias states that people tend to notice evidence that supports a person's existing beliefs and attitudes and are more likely to believe that evidence (Waldrop 12,633). Similarly, people generally choose to consume media that confirm their existing beliefs and attitudes, an idea known as selective exposure (Baran and Davis 105-106). This helps people avoid uncomfortable feelings of dissonance to preserve their existing views and ideas, an idea known as cognitive consistency (Baran and Davis 105-106). Particularly in social media, in which user newsfeeds are based on algorithms and user preferences, the desire to avoid dissonant feelings and the resulting selective exposure leads to social bubbles and an echo chamber effect (Waldrop 12,633). Researcher Waldrop explains, "From that perspective, a Facebook or Twitter newsfeed is just confirmation bias backed with computer power: What you see when you look at the top of the feed is determined algorithmically by what you and your friends like. Any discordant information gets pushed further and further down the queue, creating an insidious echo chamber" (12,633). Therefore, when a person views a fake news post on social media and interacts with or shares the post, the person's like-minded friends are also likely to see, relate to, and believe that post.

By August, September and November 2016, more people were engaging in fake news on Facebook than real news, including on election day, November 8, when people engaged with fake news 8.7 million times as compared to 7.3 million engagements in real news (Curtis). The information attacks continued after election day, too, resulting in 56% of the 126 million impressions estimated by Facebook (Stretch). Many of the posts, both before and after the election, highlighted divisive social issues in addition to posts attacking Hillary Clinton and

Donald Trump, including LGBT issues, race, police brutality, immigration, religion, and gun rights (Stretch; Ashbrook; Parlapiano and Lee). Many seemed intent on sowing discord among U.S. citizens (Stretch; Curtis). A Facebook page called Stop A.I. published a photo of

Figure 1: Social media posts created by the Russian troll factory, Internet Research Agency (MacFarquhar)

three women in an ambiguous location wearing burqas and with question marks superimposed over their heads (Parlapiano and Lee). Text across the image read, “LIKE AND SHARE IF YOU WANT BURQA BANNED IN AMERICA: STOP ALL INVADERS,” and the accompanying message read, “Who is behind the mask? A man? A woman? A terrorist? Burqa is a security risk and it should be banned on U.S. soil!” (Parlapiano and Lee). The post received 11,000 reactions, 1.1 thousand comments, and 55,000 shares (Parlapiano and Lee). A sponsored post by a Facebook Page called Army of Jesus included a visually stirring image of a muscular devil about to arm-wrestle a determined Jesus dressed in white (Parlapiano and Lee). Text above the image posed a dialogue between the two: “SATAN: IF I WIN CLINTON WINS!” “JESUS: NOT IF I CAN HELP IT!” (Parlapiano and Lee). Text below the image read “PRESS ‘LIKE’ TO HELP JESUS WIN!’ (Parlapiano and Lee). The accompanying message read, “Today Americans are able to elect a president with godly moral principles. Hillary is a Satan, and her crimes and lies had proved just how evil she is. And even though Donald Trump isn’t a saint by any means, he’s at least an honest man and he cares deeply for this country. My vote goes for him!” (Parlapiano

and Lee). Posts such as these touched on partisan ideas pulled from real news, such as the "Crooked Hillary" meme about Clinton being dishonest and the 9/11 idea that Muslims are terrorists (Curtis). The posts can be shared by thousands of accounts steered by bots and paid Russian trolls and reach exponential spread (Curtis).

Around 2013, the Kremlin established the Internet Research Agency in St. Petersburg, Russia to lead over a thousand Russian citizens in a propaganda campaign, much of it in the form of a disinformation campaign against the United States (MacFarquhar). These people, known as trolls, had one goal, according to Ludmila Savchuk, a St. Petersburg-based activist who went undercover as a paid Russian troll: "to wrap assigned ideas around the most personal stories" (qtd. in Osipove and Byrd). The trolls would take subjects assigned by the Kremlin's Internet Research Agency, make them into personal and emotional social media posts, and spread them to the Russian and American publics to raise Russian patriotism and American friction (Ashbrook; Osipove and Byrd; MacFarquhar). Sometimes posts shared real news with a misleading or Russian-backed slant and from a fake account; other times posts shared fabricated news published to websites and blogs created to host Russian-made fake news (MacFarquhar; Stretch; Ashbrook).

One former Internet Research Agency troll, Aleksei, began working for the Agency for the generous $1400 a week paycheck (MacFarquhar). In his interview with *The New York Times,* he describes rooms of people writing propaganda for the Kremlin (MacFarquhar). Some people would write posts in Russian and some in English, some celebrating Russian power and achievement, including the annexation of Crimea, and others about American discord, such as the U.S. elections (MacFarquhar). "The main idea was to work on people's thinking, to raise

patriotism among the Russian people and to portray the U.S. negatively," said Sergei, another paid Russian troll of the Internet Research Agency (qtd. in MacFarquhar).

Although they worked in different rooms, Aleksei could hear the English-language writers "bragging about creating thousands of fake social media accounts" and discussing tactics such as the best time to post for American audiences (MacFarquhar). Aleksei said that both divisions wrote articles and social media posts and comments with the general theme, "life was good in Russia under Putin and it was bad in the U.S. under Obama" (qtd. in MacFarquhar). Aleksei's job was to take assigned key words and subject lines and create blog posts (MacFarquhar). Sergei worked with the posts after they were published (MacFarquhar). His job was to post on the blog articles written by other Internet Research Agency staff; he had a quota to make at least 20 shares and 40 original comments a day (MacFarquhar). These comments and shares would be made from fake social media profile with personas created to look like the demographic they were targeting (Parlapiano and Lee). Ellen Stoever was an Internet Research Agency Facebook profile of an older white Pennsylvanian female with short blonde hair (Parlapiano and Lee). Other Russian Facebook and Twitter profiles included Nurse Fay RN CCM, Lilia Morraz, Harry Miller, and Matt Skiber, all supposedly Americans (Parlapiano and Lee).

Some employees of the troll factory would take things a step further, attempting to initiate real-life action (Parlapiano and Lee). Ellen Stoever, the fake Pennsylvanian woman, shared a post for a Miners for Trump rally in Philadelphia, to be held six days before the election (Parlapiano and Lee). "DON'T MISS THIS CHANCE TO SAVE PA FROM DEPRESSION," the event image said; "bring signs, speak out, take pics and vids, tweet, spread the truth!"

(Parlapiano and Lee). The Ellen Stoever profile's accompanying message quoted the Matt Skiber profile:

> Matt Skiber..shares.. . PENNSYLVANIA "Please share this flyer and invite your friends and family! Every person matters. Come and tell how democrats are ruining state welfare. We must win Pennsylvania or we may lose all!" #TrumpPence2016 #NeverHillary #Pennsylvania #Philly #Trumptrain (Parlapiano and Lee).

The Internet Research Agency planned many rallies on at least eight different days (Parlapiano and Lee). The five days scheduled for before the election were all for pro-Trump, while two of the three rally days scheduled following the election were anti-Trump (Parlapiano and Lee).

Some agency accounts reached out to local Trump campaign staff members about the rallies, and at least once a Trump staffer agreed to provide signs for an Agency-organized rally (Parlapiano and Lee). At one point, the Agency paid a rally attendee to dress as Hillary Clinton in a prison uniform; the attendee then posed in a cage on a flatbed truck (Parlapiano and Lee). Many Tweets and Facebook posts about the rallies and other pro-Trump commentary tagged Donald Trump and high-profile people around him, including Donald Trump, Jr., and Ivanka Trump (Parlapiano and Lee). Other Russian trolls were also tagged (Parlapiano and Lee).

Furthermore, each Russian troll was reinforced with a botnet, an army of bots (Curtis; MacFarquhar). Using the same tactics as marketers, Internet Research Agency trolls would use bots to increase article page views, spread posts, and increase a post's likes, adding a sense of legitimacy to the posts and making them more exciting (Curtis; Osipove and Byrd). "Once a blog post was created . . . The computers were designed to forward the post to the agency's countless fake accounts, opening and closing the post to create huge numbers of fake page views," said Aleksei (MacFarquhar). Bots were programmed to share Facebook and Twitter posts, makes

replies and comments, search and share internet articles on specific topics, and create new fake profiles using information scraped from the web (Ashbrook; Curtis; Ferrara). "You can try and make an individual tweet look really popular by getting 100,000 bots to retweet it," explains Ben Nimmo, an information warfare expert and a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council Research Center (Osipove and Byrd). Social media users, angry and partisan, eagerly shared these posts, introducing them to their friends in their echo chamber (Burkhardt 12). According to a study by researchers at MIT, fake news spreads much more rapidly on Twitter than does real news (Dizikes). “We found that falsehood diffuses significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth, in all categories of information, and in many cases by an order of magnitude,” says MIT professor and study co-author Sinan Aral (Dizikes). The study also found that, despite the speed of the bots, humans spread fake news faster and deeper (Dizikes). This is likely because falsities tend to be more exciting and novel, the researchers suggest (Dizikes). Tony Haile, Chartbeat CEO, suggests it’s because people often share posts of articles without clicking through and reading the article (Burkhardt 12). Haile looked at two billion visits across the web in a month and 10,000 articles shared on social media and found two things (12). First, 55% of people who clicked on an article post spent fewer than 15 seconds actively on that page (12). Second, “there is no relationship whatsoever between the amount a piece of content is shared and the amount of attention an average reader will give that content” (12). Other factors include prior exposure to a message, repetition of a message, the medium through which a message is broadcast, the state of mind of the user at the time of the message, the existing beliefs and ideologies of the user, and social pressures (West; Ashbrook; Pennycook et al. 3).

Chapter 6. Learning from Organizational Responses: A Case Study Approach to Countering Misinformation and Disinformation

One way for organizations to learn how to respond to fake news is to study other organizations who have already dealt with it. In the next several pages, this paper will look at how five organizations handled various types of fake news. Those organizations include FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency; the City of Wood River, Illinois; Starbucks Corporation; Planned Parenthood; and Comet Ping Pong pizzeria.

Federal Emergency Management Agency: Sharks in the Streets

In September of 2018, Hurricane Florence hit the coasts of Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina ("Florence Gone"). The Hurricane resulted in severe flooding and left hundreds of thousands of residents without power and at least 37 dead ("Florence Gone"). As recovery initiatives began, a photo began circulating on Twitter showing a shark swimming down a flooded street, allegedly brought there in part by Hurricane Florence (@GenosPicks). If the image were real, this would mean additional danger to residents attempting to escape or return to their homes and to rescue workers in the area. If the photograph caused concern or panic, it would bring additional strain on rescue workers and rescue resources (Naylor). The photograph was a fake, a photo manipulation created by someone years earlier and which had circulated after virtually every major hurricane (@BuzzFeedNews).

Aware of the history of fake news following natural disasters, FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, was eager to stop fake news in its tracks before it gained traction (Naylor). "While pictures of sharks swimming are relatively harmless, "rumors can impede emergency responders or divert attention and limited resources during a time of great need," said Frank Cilluffo, director of the McCrary Institute for Critical Infrastructure Protection and Cyber Systems at Auburn University" (qtd. in Naylor). This is what happened after Hurricane Katrina when rumors circulated of lawlessness and disorder in the storm refugee-filled Superdome of New Orleans (Naylor). FEMA, therefore, created a rumor-control webpage to refute false claims (Naylor). The webpage was then publicized on FEMA's official social media

feeds with a message requesting that social media users check the page through the Hurricane Florence storm and cleanup efforts and to not spread false information (@fema). The story was also shared with traditional news media, which wrote about the story (Naylor).

In the Internet era, it is impossible to ensure no fake news will spread. However, having a plan to refute fake reports, whether those reports are misinformation, disinformation, or confusing satire or parody, gave FEMA the advantage they needed to keep fake news at a minimum (Naylor). Self-publishing through its website and social media gave the agency complete control over those particular messages, and traditional media helped give its message a wider audience (Naylor).

City of Wood River, Illinois: WoodRiverCityCouncil.com

January 2018 was a time of disruption for the City of Wood River, Illinois. The city council announced that their aquatic center would not be opening for the 2018 season due to safety concern and rising costs, the National Weather Service had issued an advisory to area residents not to burn leaves due to the dry conditions, and the city was in the middle of campaigning for public offices (Maguire; Schulz). Then on Friday, January 19, the staff at Wood River City Hall were inundated with calls from concerned residents about news stories they'd seen posted on social media (Maguire). The first article, titled "Wood River Leaf Burning Policy," was a post supposedly by the Wood River City Council announcing a change to the city's leaf burning policy that allowed residents to burn leaves year-round, an alleged change that was welcomed by some and upsetting to others (Schulz; Maguire). Another alleged city council announcement regarded a campaign to make it illegal to show tattoos within the city (Schulz). A third, titled “Wood River Teen Apprehended,” claimed that the Wood River police saw "a major spike in violent crime after the announcement that the Mayor had solely chose to close the community’s Aquatic Center without explanation” (Schulz). It also quoted the teen, a 13-year-old, who the article claimed was arrested and then blamed his insubordination on the recent closure of the Aquatic Center: “Maybe if the Aquatic Center was open, teens like me would have something to do" (Schulz). However, all three stories were fabricated (Maguire). The aquatic center was closed under the unanimous decision of Mayor Cheryl Maguire, City

Manager Jim Schneider, all four City Council members, and Parks and Recreation Director Jason Woody, who cited safety and costs (Schulz). The Wood River City Council had no plans to attempt to outlaw displaying tattoos, which would have been a violation of national free speech, nor did they loosen the leaf burning policy, which, along with the air pollution increased leaf burning would cause, is what most of the calls to Wood River City Hall that day were regarding (Maguire; Schulz). Additionally, Mayor Maguire was concerned that residents burning leaves during a time that the land was dry and winds were high would risk wildfire and thus endanger the lives of those in her town (Maguire).

The false stories came from WoodRiverCityCouncil.com, a site impersonating the City of Wood River and its city council (Edwards). The fraudulent site included an official-looking design, the city logo, fake news announcements regarding city policy, an event calendar, and forms (Edwards). The City's real website, WoodRiver.org, contains similar information (Edwards). Originally, Mayor Maguire thought nothing could be done about the website because satire is protected by the U.S. Constitution (Schulz). However, there were three factors that changed her belief. First, the City of Wood River logo is copyrighted (Schulz). Second, nowhere on WoodRiverCityCouncil.com did it say that the site was satire (Maguire). Third, Madison County State's Attorney Tom Gibbons said this particular website crossed the line of free speech because the false leaf burning policy change announcement presented a clear and present danger (Maguire). The Wood River police department, which the City had contacted along with local news media to help correct the disinformation, opened an investigation into the owner and publisher of the website (Maguire). The owner was quickly identified and contacted, and the website was taken down the next day (Maguire). The motivation behind the fake site, the website owner confessed, was to help his friend who was running for mayor of Wood River (Maguire).

The City of Wood River did not have a communications person on staff, did not monitor social media, did not have a specific plan for countering fake news, and did not have social media accounts through which it could monitor public discussion of its brand or directly refute false claims (Maguire). However, Mayor Maguire and her staff did have an open line of communication with Wood River

residents, who reported the issue; had a working relationship with the local law enforcement and local media, both of which helped spread the word; engaged legal counsel; and acted quickly (Maguire). The City also reached out directly to the person identified as the creator of the website (Maguire). In combination, the City of Wood River was able to put a stop to the disinformation from the impersonator website before true damage could be caused.

Starbucks

In the years directly proceeding 9/11, patriotism was extremely high, and acting in a way that someone might seem unpatriotic was a serious social offense (Snopes Staff). Therefore, when a Starbucks barista near the 9/11 ground zero charged rescue workers $130 for three cases of water, the company faced serious backlash (Snopes Staff). To make matters worse, the company did not make reparations for its employee's bad judgment until the error was brought into the light by the news media (Snopes Staff). That is why when an email, written by a U.S. military sergeant, circulated the idea that a product request from Marines deployed in Iraq was answered by Starbucks with a message that Starbucks would not provide the product because they "don't support the War and anyone in it," the public was primed to believe the message and eager to spread the news and to end its support of the unpatriotic company (Snopes Staff; Kuchler). However, the report was fake (Snopes Staff). The Sgt. Howard C. Wright, who wrote the email, had heard the false report from a friend (Snopes Staff). Already angry at the events around him and Starbucks' prior behavior, Sgt. Wright believed the story immediately (Snopes Staff). Without verifying the contents of the rumor, Sgt. Wright drafted an angry email and sent it to ten of his friends (Snopes Staff). The email then went viral (Snopes Staff).

After catching wind of the story, Starbucks quickly contacted Sgt. Wright directly to address his concerns (Snopes Staff). Upon request of the alleged letter from Starbucks, the letter could not be produced; it seems to never have existed (Snopes Staff). Starbucks also refuted the rumor on its website, where the company highlighted Starbucks' partnerships with the American Red Cross and the United Service Organization, including providing over 141,000 pounds of coffee and over one million three-packs of VIA

Ready Brew to relief efforts in times of conflict, providing over 220,000 three-packs of VIA for USO care packages, and encouraging its staff to donate their weekly coffee mark-out for USO care packages and for other donations (Snopes Staff). The rumor surfaced again a decade later, this time including lack of support for the British Royal Marines (“Starbucks Support”). In a 2013 update to its original post on the matter, Starbucks reiterated its messages correcting the fabricated information and highlighting its support for military-related organizations:

> On behalf of Starbucks more than 200,000 dedicated partners (employees), we want to set the record straight on an old rumor concerning our company’s lack of support for the military and our troops. This rumor, dating back to 2004, claims a lack of Starbucks support for the U.S. Marines, and has evolved to include a lack of support for the British Royal Marines. In both instances, the rumor is not, and has never been, true. (“Starbucks Support”)

Starbucks was quick to respond directly to the person who first wrote the damaging email and continues to reiterate the message as needed (Snopes Staff). The company also self-published its rebuttal on its website as a shareable way to gets its message directly to its customers (Snopes Staff). While the immortal nature of material published on the Internet has made it impossible for Starbucks to completely squash the fabricated story, it has been able to successfully share its story with those most likely to listen.

Comet Ping Pong

The months leading up to the 2016 presidential election between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump were fraught with partisan division and mistrust (Silverman et al.; Achenbach and Clement). According to a Pew Research Center study about partisanship, released during the summer of 2016, "For the first time in surveys dating to 1992, majorities in both parties express not just unfavorable but very unfavorable views of the other party. And today, sizable shares of both Democrats and Republicans say the other party stirs feelings of not just frustration, but fear and anger" ("Partisanship"). Fake news and accusations of fake news alike were rampant, and a number of conspiracy theories circled the Internet (Silverman et al.). Then in October 2016, WikiLeaks released a series of reports on emails, received from

hackers, allegedly from John Podesta's private Gmail account ("Podesta Emails;" Assange). The reports, which were accompanied by thousands of raw-data emails which anyone could access and read, discussed the contents of these emails including campaign strategy and discussion of a fundraiser at Comet Ping Pong pizzeria in Washington D.C. ("The Podesta Emails;" Gillin; Assange). Comet Ping Pong is a D.C. pizzeria known for its pizza, live music, and ping pong tables; it also hosts children's birthday parties (LaCapria).

Following the leak of the Podesta Emails, users of 4Chan and Twitter discussed possible connections between Clinton, Podesta, Comet Ping Pong owner James Alefantis, and a child sex trafficking ring (Gillin). A Reddit user published a summary of a complex "Pizzagate" conspiracy, claiming, among other things, that "pizza" was code for pedophilia, restaurant menus and décor contained pedophilia symbolism, and Hillary Clinton and John Podesta were leading a child sex slavery ring out of hidden rooms at Comet Ping Pong (LaCapria; Gillin; Drobnic Holan; Hynum and Cray). Fake news sites, including YourNewsWire.com, tap-news.com, and USA Newsflash, turned the Reddit post into a story and publicized it on social media (Drobnic Holan). According to Drobnic Holan, each news story earned approximately 100,000 engagements per Facebook post. (Drobnic Holan). As the theory spread, Comet Ping Pong’s staff, staff's family members, and neighboring businesses began receiving harassing and threatening phone calls, text messages, and social-media messages (Hynum and Cray). Westboro Baptist Church picketed the pizzeria while yelling homophobic and anti-Muslim slurs, and the company's Yelp page was locked by Yelp to stop rumor-related negative reviews and harassment via its web pages (Hynum and Cray; LaCapria).

By this time, the election had passed and the police had called the story “fictitious” (LaCapria; Hynum and Cray). The rumors, however, had not stopped (LaCapria). Store manager Bryce Reh spoke to his staff about turning their phones off and avoiding the television to preserve their mental health (Hynum and Cray).

Comet Ping Pong reached out to its patrons through Facebook to assure music-goers that all of its shows had security personnel and that given the mostly online nature of the rumors, no in-person altercation

was expected (LaCapria). To share their story to a broad audience, store manager Bryce Reh also reached out to *The New York Times* to offer himself and owner James Alefantis for an exclusive interview (Hynum and Cray).

On December 4, 2018, the rumor hit its pinnacle when a man named Edgar Welch entered Comet Ping Pong with an AR-15 assault rifle, fired a shot, and then searched the restaurant for children being held captive as victims of the "Pizzagate" pedophilia ring (LaCapria; Gillin). No one was hurt, and the man was soon apprehended; he later told police he found no evidence of child abuse and pedophilia (LaCapria; Hynum and Cray).

When the unfounded rumors began, Reh seriously considered if and how to respond for Comet Ping Pong (Hynum and Cray). “In the beginning, it was mostly a matter of trying to figure out when to speak and, far more importantly, when not to speak. Many times, people can’t resist getting involved in a conversation that is about themselves, but it’s not always the most productive way to get that conversation to go away,” said Reh (Hynum and Cray). For the most part, Reh and Comet Ping Pong decided to act quietly, staying open and making sure they upheld their business and product standards and speaking with staff about the rumors (Hynum and Cray). When the voices were loud enough to warrant a response, Reh chose to focus on speaking with patrons and non-conspiracy theorists, those most likely to listen, rather than with those making the accusations (Hynum and Cray). The company self-published messages to patrons via Facebook, and Reh reached out to high-profile media (Hynum and Cray). The company also kept in close communication with the police department (Hynum and Cray).

Planned Parenthood

Planned Parenthood is a national provider of sexual and reproductive health care and education and provides services such as STD and HIV testing and treatment, birth control, cancer screenings, vaccines, prenatal care, transgender health services, sterilization, infertility screenings and treatment, UTI testing and treatment, and abortion, among other services ("Our Impact;" "Facts & Figures"). Planned Parenthood also advocates for access to such services ("Our Impact"). Many Americans, especially conservative religious

groups, consider abortion and certain forms of birth control mu2 rder of human beings and a priority above other concerns ("United States"). Since Planned Parenthood provides abortion services at some of its clinics and is an outspoken advocate of access to abortion services and information, many anti-abortion activists actively work to end Planned Parenthood's abortion services through strategies that include attempting to pass legislation that would end grants and reimbursements by state and federal governments for sliding-scale and Medicaid/Medicare-paid services ("United States;" "Facts & Figures").

In July 2015, the Center for Medical Progress, a conservative group, released a press release claiming Planned Parenthood sells aborted baby parts (Evon). As evidence, the organization released an accompanying nine-minute video of a Center for Medical Progress activist, acting undercover as a biotech company representative, speaking with Planned Parenthood Federation of America Senior Director of Medical Services Dr. Deborah Nucatola (Evon; Groch-Begley and Boguhn). "New undercover footage shows Planned Parenthood Federation of America's Senior Director of Medical Services, Dr. Deborah Nucatola, describing how Planned Parenthood sells the body parts of aborted fetuses, and admitting she uses partial-birth abortions to supply intact body parts. . . . The sale or purchase of human fetal tissue is a federal felony punishable by up to 10 years in prison and a fine of up to $500,000 (42 U.S.C. 289g-2). [The Center For Medical Progress, 7/14/15]" (Groch-Begley and Boguhn). Planned Parenthood responded to the video allegations almost immediately with a written response from Planned Parenthood Federation of America Vice President of Communications Eric Ferrero and a video response from Planned Parenthood Federation of America President Cecile Richards (Ferrero; Richards; "Press Releases"). Its messages included brief explanations regarding fetal tissue donations for scientific research and reimbursements for associated costs and an accusation that the videos were "heavily edited" and made by one of many discredited organizations who release such misleading videos attacking abortion providers (Ferraro). Planned Parenthood also released multiple memos to its employees in the next several weeks, reiterating that yes, Planned Parenthood provides tissue donations; yes, they accept reimbursements for associated costs; and no, they do not profit from tissue donations (Greve, *Interview 1*; Greve, *Interview 2*). A second, eight-minute video was

released seven days after the first, and Planned Parenthood responded again by publishing statements (Somashekhar and Ohlheiser; Evon). Those who believed the videos were real were outraged, as were anti-abortion lawmakers, and took to social media to criticize the organization (Calmes; LoBianco). "Harvesting human organs to be sold like brake pads for a Buick is beyond barbaric, it's immoral, grotesque, & evil. #PlannedParenthood," read a tweet by prominent Republican Governor Mike Huckabee (qtd. in LoBianco). Republicans on the House Energy and Commerce Committee opened an investigation of Planned Parenthood and its alleged misconduct and threatened a government shutdown in the fall if Planned Parenthood wasn't defunded (Calmes).

Eventually, a longer video, supposedly the raw footage of the recording from which the other videos were made, was released by the Center for Medical Progress (Evon). The two-hour video showed that the short videos omitted key dialogue (Groch-Begley and Boguhn). An edit cut Dr. Nucatola shooting down the idea of Planned Parenthood or any of its partners, presumably including the company of the alleged biotech company representative, selling fetal tissue (Groch-Begley and Boguhn). Eight minutes was cut from the middle of a talk about money and reimbursements, creating a juxtaposition that made it sound like Dr. Nucatola was talking about the price of "specimen" rather than the price of shipping and related reimbursable costs (Groch-Begley and Boguhn). Multiple references to "tissue donation" were also omitted (Groch-Begley and Boguhn). In a third-party expert analysis of both the videos and the corresponding transcripts released by the Center for Medical Progress, experts revealed that the two-hour allegedly raw-footage video was also edited and contained omissions (Calmes). Furthermore, the contact person for the Center for Medical Progress video previously worked for another organization that was also criticized for making deceptive videos in attempts to discredit Planned Parenthood (Groch-Begley and Boguhn).

After the third video was released, Planned Parenthood Federation of America brought on a crisis communications firm, SKDKnickerbocker (Haberkorn and Palmer). To expose the videos as misleading, Planned Parenthood hired third-party experts, who were unaware of the funding source, to analyze the videos and transcripts (LoBianco; Calmes). Cecile Richards wrote a letter to congressional leaders

highlighting the findings of the analysis, including evidence that even the long, allegedly unedited video was edited, descriptions of the cuts in each video, and descriptions of the discrepancies in the transcripts (LoBianco; Calmes). Richards also spoke before Congress at a House hearing (LoBianco). Regardless of the video debunking, several states have tried passing legislation to "defund" Planned Parenthood by eliminating the reimbursements for accepting Medicare/Medicaid and by eliminating the grants for providing services for low-income men and women ("DOJ"). These grants and reimbursements, anti-abortion proponents say, free other funds for Planned Parenthood to provide abortion services ("Facts & Figures;" "United States").

According to U.S. law, profiting from the sale of fetal tissue is illegal (Groch-Begley and Boguhn). Accepting donations of fetal tissue with consent, however, is legal, as is accepting reimbursements for shipping, storage, and other related costs (Groch-Begley and Boguhn). While the ethics of abortion are subjective, the law is mostly not. The videos and press releases alleging criminal activity by Planned Parenthood were backed up by a video that used misappropriation of words and misleading manipulation of the footage; no legal wrong was done by Planned Parenthood, concluded both a California court and a Texas grand jury (Domonoske; "DOJ"). The Center for Medical Progress, however, likely did. The actors were charged for using a fake driver's license to access the Planned Parenthood meeting, attempting to buy human tissue, recording 14 people without their consent in a state where all parties must be notified, and conspiracy (Domonoske).

Planned Parenthood used an integrative approach in responding to fake news, using reactive communication, legal defense, and legislative defense (Evon; Groch-Begley and Boguhn; Ferraro; Richards; "DOJ;" Calmes; Somashekhar and Ohlheiser; LoBianco). They were quick to respond to and correct the allegations; self-published via their website, email, and social media; used print and video media; and reached out to Congress (Evon; Groch-Begley and Boguhn; Ferraro; Richards; "DOJ;" Calmes; Somashekhar and Ohlheiser; LoBianco). Planned Parenthood regularly communicated a clear message to employees who could then take that message to their social circles (Greve, Interview 1; Greve, Interview 2).

They also brought in specialized help, a crisis communications agency, who could provide extra staff and expertise when the crisis was renewed after the release of a third video (Haberkorn and Palmer).

Chapter 7. Learning from Professionals: A Literature Review of Articles by Communication Agencies, Professionals, and Professional Organizations Regarding Fighting Misinformation and Disinformation

While it's useful to examine the way organizations who have faced fake news have used communication to respond, it's also valuable to look at how professional communicators suggest approaching fake news. Strategic communications, or public relations, is "about influencing, engaging and building a relationship with key stakeholders to contribute to the way an organization is perceived," thus solving business problems and meeting organizational goals ("Learn About PR"). Therefore, seasoned strategic communications professionals, trained and experienced in creating and nurturing key relationships, and especially crisis communicators, those with expertise in responding to true and inaccurate negative news, are in the best positions to teach the best ways to handle responses to fake news. The following professional communicators, professional associations, and communication agencies share their expertise on handling fake news aimed at their or their clients' organizations.

Hubbell Communications is a public affairs and public relations firm in Portland, Oregon, that specializes in crisis communication, media relations, marketing, ballot campaigns, issue advocacy, digital, grassroots activation, coalition building, and internal communications ("About Hubbell"). Fake news must be planned for, the spokesperson for Hubbell Communications says, in order to avoid a crisis for the organization or to minimize the damage caused by the fake news (“Businesses"). "With the real time nature of today's social media . . . companies are better served by thinking proactively by devising a crisis plan before the crisis arrives," reads the agency's blog (“Businesses"). Responses could include traditional media, such as outreach to newspapers, radio and television; paid and organic social media; and grassroots efforts "designed to push the truth out to family, friends, employees, customers and other stakeholders" (“Businesses"). "In addition, a good crisis management toolbox will include pre-developed messaging, a trained spokesperson, and a comprehensive digital communications, media monitoring and media relations strategy," says the Hubbell Communications spokesperson (“Businesses"). "In short, the key to protecting

yourself or your organization is to proactively prepare, consistently monitor and creatively respond. Doing these things will stop fake news early and keep it from doing any long-term damage" ("Businesses").

Eddie Velez is a marketing professional, designer, author, and CEO and founder of Success by Design communications firm (Velez). In his company's blog, Velez argues that fake news has changed the communications landscape, and businesses must adjust their communication strategies to get their messages across (Velez). When creating content, Velez says, including when creating social media posts, share only reliable and truthful information that provides real value and substance (Velez). The communicator should ask him or herself, "Would sharing this help or hurt my brand?" (Velez). A wrong message could hurt the organization's brand, and so could spreading a message that is later labeled fake (Velez). In a time when journalists are often not trusted, it's more important than ever for them to protect their credibility (Velez). "If they see you share quality and not frivolity, they'll feel safe to consider you as a source for an interview," says Velez (Velez). Furthermore, when space allows, cite your sources (Velez). "Social media has changed many paradigms. It's provided a powerful platform for communication that people with no scruples and an agenda can manipulate. . . . we have a responsibility to check things out – don't take anything at face value" (Velez).

Katie Creaser, Senior Vice President of Affect Communications, shared with PR News magazine, an online industry trade magazine for professional communicators, how public relations organizations and professionals can prevent becoming part of the problem and creating their own fake news-related crises (Creaser). Pitch real and relevant news, use real sources who are true experts in their fields, create real content that doesn't misappropriate words or images, and be ethical and transparent, Creaser says (Creaser).

> "From phony click-bait news sites, to unqualified sources to falsified stories, fake news—however you define it—is a threat to the PR industry. If our job is to ethically persuade public opinion by working with credible media, it follows that it's vital that the public's trust in a free press not be eroded. . . . For that reason, it is critical that PR pros be more accountable than ever for their work.

That includes supporting credible media by examining our contributions and taking a role in the fight against fake news." (Creaser)

Creaser also stresses the importance of working for small changes in our family and friend circles and within our organizations (Creaser). "On a small scale, we should be discouraging the spread of fake news within our networks (including friends and family), improving media literacy and helping those around us to better discern good journalism from garbage. We should be mentoring young people on best practices for media monitoring and how to tell a true news story from a fake. . . . On a larger scale, consider supporting organizations that are committed to supporting journalism, such as the Committee to Protect Journalists, The News Literacy Project, The Arthur W. Page Center and First Draft" (Creaser). Organizations most prone to fake news attacks could do the same.

Ellen Hartman, APR, is a PRSA Fellow and is the CEO of Hartman Public Relations, a full-service public relations agency specializing in the foodservice industry (Hartman). Writing for Restaurant Informer magazine, Hartman shared her view on rewriting the crisis communication plan with fake news in mind (Hartman). First, she says, it is important to monitor social media with a tool such as Hootsuite, as social media is where a lot of conspiracy theories, such as Pizzagate, are developed and fed (Hartman). "Implementing a social media monitoring system makes your brand aware of any negative information in real, superhuman time, so that you can respond quickly and, in the best case, stem the fire," Hartman says (Hartman). Second, organizations should work with a lawyer to predict scenarios and plan legal responses that can be implemented immediately, should the need arise (Hartman). Third, develop a relationship with a public relations team that you can pull in on demand, and create a crisis communications response (Hartman). "They will also have key relationships with media and social media influencers that you will need so your side of the story is heard" and can assist the legal team in social media policy, Hartman says (Hartman).

Wendy Bulawa Agudelo is a seasoned strategic communicator with nearly 20 years of experience in public relations and who serves on the Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress PR Task Force and on

the staff of Axia Public Relations (Bulawa Agudelo). According to Bulawa Agudelo, it's important to consistently monitor your client's or organization's brands and to share your findings with your clients (Bulawa Agudelo). "Media monitoring tools," Bulawa Agudelo says, ". . . ensure that inappropriate mentions or poor reviews aren't smearing your client's brand and business. With their increasing capabilities, you can strategically set media monitoring tools (such as Axia Public Relations' MediaReachSM and MediaSignalSM) to monitor false information about a client, spokesperson or brand. Sharing these reports regularly with clients will assist in educating them about the relevance and imperative need for media monitoring tools as elements of their overall PR program" (Bulawa Agudelo). When negative reviews or fake news is found, organizations must respond quickly (Bulawa Agudelo). For legitimate criticism, organizations can respond to users (Bulawa Agudelo). For fake news-related posts, the communicator can work with the publishing platform to get the inappropriate posts removed (Bulawa Agudelo). For misinformation or disinformation that goes viral, the real story must be shared quickly and transparently and with care not to fan the flames by repeating the misinformation or disinformation (Bulawa Agudelo). Instead of repeating the accusations, Bulawa Agudelo says, focus the message on a fact that refutes the allegations and then back up the statement with facts (Bulawa Agudelo). Additionally, use wire services to spread a message broadly and simultaneously to reputable sources (Bulawa Agudelo).

Lisa Arledge Powell is a communications professional, chair of the Public Relations Society of America's Health Academy Conference, and the president of MediaSource, an award-winning creative agency that specializes in content marketing and PR and media relations ("Content Marketing;" Arledge Powell). Writing for the Public Relations Society of America, Arledge Powell shared a list of strategies for the communicator to use in responding to a fake news attack on the communicator's organization (Arledge Powell). Treat news like a crisis, respond quickly and transparently, communicate through your news media and influencer relationships, "flood the market with REAL NEWS with a positive narrative," and determine if legal action is appropriate (Arledge Powell).

Nikhil Dey is the president of Genesis Burson-Marsteller, and he spoke with the professionals at the 2018 Asia-Pacific Innovation Summit about handling a crisis in the fake news era (Dey). It's important to apply crisis management principles to fake news, Dey said, including creating a fake news crisis communications plan (Dey). ". . . [F]ake news is such a big problem right now. That's something I'm evangelizing big time with my clients, and I think there are two or three things that you can do to get their attention. One is case studies. If you can show real, local case studies and online businesses that make them sit up and say, hey, that could happen to me, which is a very real possibility, they take it a little more seriously" says Dey (Dey). This, he says must be followed by fake news crisis planning and simulation (Dey). Just like an organization's crisis team would test other crisis scenarios, it is important to test the organizational response to a fake news simulation (Dey).

Gheorge-Ilie Fârte and Daniel-Rareş Obadă are researchers and professors at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University Department of Communication Science and Public Relations in Romania (Fârte and Obadă 26). In their article "Reactive Public Relations Strategies for Managing Fake News in the Online Environment" in the journal *Modern Openings*, Fârte and Obadă identify strategies for dealing with ten different types of fake news (Fârte and Obadă 26). Their work is based in great part on work by William Benoit, an associate professor of communication at the University of Missouri-Columbia, titled "Image Repair Discourse and Crisis Communication," published in the journal *Public Relations Review* (Fârte and Obadă; Benoit). In Benoit's article, he identifies 14 types of communication responses, divided into five categories, that organizations can use to respond to an issue or crisis (Benoit 179-181). These categories are denial, which includes simple denial an act occurred and blame shifting; evasion of responsibility, which includes claiming provocation, claiming defeasibility, claiming the act was accidental, and claiming good intention; reducing the offensiveness of the event, which includes bolstering a positive, minimization of a negative, differentiation between the offending act and a worse act, transcendence, attacking the accuser, and compensation to victims; corrective action; and mortification/apologia (179-181).

In "Reactive Public Relations Strategies," Fârte and Obadă apply several types of responses, primarily Benoit's responses, to their ten types of fake news: clickbait, satire and parody, imposter content, misinformation, misleading content, false connection, false content, manipulated content, disinformation, and fabricated content (Fârte and Obadă 31-32). To counteract clickbait, communicators can employ silence/inaction or can threaten to sue, perhaps for defamation or libel (Fârte and Obadă 35). To counteract satire or parody, use a prebuttal, attack with embarrassment, or threaten legal action (Fârte and Obadă 35). To counteract imposter content, attack the offender's reputation, attack with embarrassment, or threaten legal action (Fârte and Obadă 36). To counteract misinformation, deny the accusations, attack the offender's reputation, or threaten legal action (Fârte and Obadă 36). To counteract misleading content, attack the offender's reputation, threaten legal action, deny the accusations, disassociate from the offensive act or the offender, ingratiate the organization to the public, or relabel the act (Fârte and Obadă 36-37). To counteract false connection, a type of misappropriation, ingratiate, disassociate, or relabel (37). To counteract false content, ingratiate, disassociate, or relabel (Fârte and Obadă 38; Tandoc et al. 144). To counteract false context, another type of misappropriation, ingratiate, disassociate, or relabel (Fârte and Obadă 38; Tandoc et al. 144). To counteract disinformation, employ a prebuttal, attack the offender's reputation, attack with embarrassment, threaten legal action, deny the accusations, disassociate from the act or the offender, relabel the act, employ silence, or employ concern (Fârte and Obadă 39). To counteract fabricated content, attack the offender's reputation, attack with embarrassment, threaten legal action, deny allegations, disassociate from the act or offender, or employ concern (Fârte and Obadă 39-40).

Chapter 8. 27 Communication Strategies Organizations Can Use to Fight Fake News

As the organizational case studies and professional articles highlighted in chapters five and six illustrate, organizations have a variety of ways to respond to misinformation and disinformation. Synthesizing this information into more concise action steps will make the information more accessible to organizations, particularly those with small or nonexistent communications staffs. Each piece of advice falls into one of two categories: proactive strategies, which can help prevent the spread of fake news and put the organization into a better position for dealing with fake news attacks, and reactive strategies, meant to help an organization deal with a fake news attack, reduce its impact, and preserve the organization's reputation as much as possible. Organizations need both types of strategies, and it's important that organizations consider both.

27 Strategies Organizations Can Use to Fight Fake News

Proactive

Have at least one communication staff person. Either hire a communications manager, make communication a formal part of another position, or outsource help. The City of Wood River could not directly respond to fake online content, or even see it, in part because they had no communication staff person assigned to handle these roles (Maguire). Planned Parenthood, on the other hand, has a team of communicators who were able to respond right away (Greve, *Interview 1*).

Develop a fake news crisis communication plan. Treating fake news like a crisis and integrating it into the organization's crisis communication plan is a running theme among communication professionals and organizations (Arledge Powell; Hartman; Dey; "Businesses"). Case studies of local organizations that are similar to one's own and dealing with fake news can be compelling to senior management (Dey). FEMA was able to stymie the spread of rumors that

could have made their work less effective and endangered rescue workers by creating and implementing a fake news communication plan that included a prebuttal (Naylor). From Planned Parenthood's quick and multi-layered response, it was clear they had used previous experiences fighting fake news to create and implement a fake news crisis communication plan (Ferrero; Groch-Begley).

Consistently monitor social media. Not only did multiple professionals mention social media monitoring, but it is also necessary if an organization wants to respond quickly (Hartman; Bulawa Agudelo). Planned Parenthood probably would not have been able to respond as quickly as they did had they not been monitoring mentions of their brand on social and digital media. The City of Wood River wasn't monitoring social media, and they only found out after residents called to complain (Maguire). Luckily for them, the crisis occurred on a Saturday when City Hall phones were open (Maguire).

Build relationships with reporters and influencers. This strategy, mentioned by multiple professionals, puts organizations in the best position for sympathetic reactions by the media during crises (Creaser; Velez). Identify key reporters and other online influencers, such as bloggers and social media personalities, follow them, and interact with them to build relationships (Velez). When pitching stories to them, pitch only stories of real value and with ethical and valuable sources, be sure to cite your sources, and be ethical and transparent when responding to reporters' questions (Creaser; Velez). These tactics will help your organization and your communications professional develop good reputations among the media (Creaser; Velez).

Create real content and cite your sources. When drafting or repurposing content for a blog, web page, or social media post, use reliable and truthful information in a format that has true substance and added value (Velez). Citing sources will provide credibility and

forthrightness for the organization and will provide sources for Internet users investigating rumors (Creaser; Velez).

Construct a webpage to respond to rumors. FEMA was able to minimize the harm from shark rumors by creating an easy-to-access rumor mill page on their website (Naylor). This content could then be turned into shareable posts disseminated through social media (Naylor). Starbucks and Planned Parenthood, similarly, both have a news section on which they refute rumors (“Starbucks Support;” “Press Releases”).

Maintain social media accounts on major platforms. Every organization has different reasons for using, or not using, each social media platform. Regardless of the other reasons and how much time is spent on each platform, it’s imperative that organizations maintain a presence on all major social media platforms. The City of Wood River was not able to directly respond to, or even see, negative and dangerous fabricated impersonator stories circulating social media (Maguire). Additionally, having a social media account allows users of that platform to complain to you directly, making such mentions easier to monitor and address. Therefore, having accounts on all major platforms is imperative.

Issue prebuttals to any predictable fake news. When a particular piece of fake news is recurring or an eminent announcement makes fake news inevitable, an organization can issue a pre-emptive statement addressing the issues before anyone else can launch their first charge, say communication professors Fârte and Obadă (Fârte and Obadă 35). FEMA, knowing the fake news pattern following hurricanes, gave a statement ahead of time to make it more difficult for fake news weeds to grow (Naylor).

Reactive

Consider both action and inaction. Comet Ping Pong had to judge whether they thought the rumors would be problematic and how they should respond, if at all, as responding to rumors can fuel fires instead of extinguishing them (Hynum and Cray). The pizzeria first chose inaction, then quiet action, in attempts to prevent self-inflicted injury in a time where any response would be read as a cover-up by conspiracy theorists (Hynum and Cray).

Respond quickly. One of the most frequent strategies given by communication professionals and organizations was to respond quickly to false allegations, particularly misinformation (Arledge Powell; Bulawa Agudelo; Hynum and Cray). Although the controversial nature of two of Planned Parenthood's services made it hopeless to think that the misleading videos would be forgotten, the organization's quick response likely put doubt in the minds of those open to consideration (Evon; Ferrero; Richards; "Press Releases").

Consider if additional communication help is needed. Even though Planned Parenthood had a team of communication professionals, they recognized that they needed extra help during the prolonged crisis surrounding the misleading videos a brought on a crisis communications agency (Haberkorn and Palmer). Specialized help could also be particularly helpful for small agencies with little or no communications staff.

Deny the false and admit any truth. Most of the professionals and professional organizations stressed the importance of only speaking the truth; this includes admitting any kernels of truth found in misleading allegations (Creaser; Velez; Bulawa Agudelo; Fârte and Obadă; Arledge Powell; Benoit). Planned Parenthood demonstrated this when it admitted to accepting compensation for donation-related expenses and then briefly explained the differences between compensation and profit (Ferrero). It's equally important to deny blame when the

organization is innocent, which Planned Parenthood also did by denying profiting from the donations (Fârte and Obadă; Benoit; Ferrero).

Be transparent and forthright. Similar to communicating truth, organizations must also be open to answering uncomfortable questions from reporters and the public. This includes responding to interviews, not dodging questions, and not minimizing any acts committed that harmed people (Creaser; Velez; Bulawa Agudelo; Fârte and Obadă; Arledge Powell; Benoit).

Self-publish. Publishing through organization-owned or controlled platforms, such as written and video messages of the organizational website, blog, and social media channels, allow the organization to deliver controlled messages directly to the public. All six in-the-field professional communicators stressed the importance of self-publishing, and all but one of the five non-communication organizations self-published in some form ("Businesses;" Velez; Creaser; Hartman; Arledge Powell; Dey).

Communicate with staff. Keeping staff informed helps minimize their stress levels and empowers them to take company messages to friends and family, such as happened with Planned Parenthood and Comet Ping Pong (Hynum and Cray; Greve, *Interview 2).*

Correct the misinformation but avoid repeating the false accusations. Multiple communicators pointed out the need for correcting misinformation (Bulawa Agudelo). Bulawa Agudelo also noted that organizations should also take care not to "fan the flames" by repeating the false accusations; instead, she says, address the allegations without directly mentioning the allegations, thus giving them credence (Arledge Powell; Bulawa Agudelo; Velez).

Craft key messages using a small number of key points. In his article, Benoit describes the many message types organizations could use, noting that the best message type or types depends on the situation (Benoit 179-181). These message types fit into five general categories:

denial, evasion of responsibility, reduction of the offensiveness of the act, corrective action, and mortification/apologia (179-181). Fârte and Obadă take these and apply them to specific types of fake news (Fârte and Obadă 35-40). Choosing two or three key points and creating messages such as those described by Benoit, Fârte, and Obadă can help the organization create targeted, consistent, and effective messages to disseminate among the organization's key publics. Planned Parenthood chose five points: Planned Parenthood provides tissue donations; Planned Parenthood does not profit from tissue donations, but they do accept cost reimbursements; Planned Parenthood is focused on quality health care; abortion patients have a right to donate tissue; and organizations have published misleading videos in the past in order to discredit Planned Parenthood (Forrero; *Greve, Interview* 1). They then crafted these points into messages of denial, including simple denial, and reduction of offensiveness, including differentiation, bolstering, and attacking the accuser (Forrero; Richards; Benoit).

Prioritize your allies and influenceable audiences. When the voices were loud enough to warrant a response, Reh of Comet Ping Pong chose to focus on speaking with patrons and non-conspiracy theorists, those most likely to listen, rather than on those making the accusations (Hynum and Cray). Benoit agrees, citing the need to identify relevant audiences and then target them with your key messages (Benoit 181-182).

Use the CEO as spokesperson for major crises and crises affecting the public. Comet Ping Pong granted an exclusive interview with both the manager and the owner, Planned Parenthood released a written statement from its communication executive and a video message from its president, and the City of Wood River presented its mayor for interviews (Hynum and Cray; Forrero; Richards; Edwards). Starbucks and FEMA, facing less drastic issues, used unnamed spokespersons ("Starbucks Support;" Naylor). These suggest, and other research

agrees, that any appropriate spokesperson may be used for minor crises, including fake news crises, but the CEO or another similar-level executive should be used for major crises and those that allegedly impact others (“CEO”).

Consider all media as communication options. Hubbell Communications points out that all media types are options for communicating to the organization’s public: traditional and digital media, earned and paid media, and reporters and non-journalist influencers ("Businesses"). Other options include newswires, trade magazines, signage, and grassroots organizers, among others (Bulawa Agudelo; “Businesses”). The City of Wood River reached out to traditionally used local papers (Schulz). They also used social media (Maguire). Not having social media accounts of their own, however, they connected with the city’s police department to issue a warning on the police department’s social media channels (Maguire). Starbucks primarily used a written statement on their website, and Planned Parenthood issued a video statement (“Starbucks Support;” Richards).

Use news wires. When speed is of the essence, news wires offer a broad and simultaneous delivery of your messages (Bulawa Agudelo). Their use ensures that the organization’s urgent message reputing and correcting the fake news is available nation-wide instantly with all organizations receiving the same message at the same time (Bulawa Agudelo).

Don’t let fake news distract the organization from keeping up its standards. Comet Ping Pong made sure they were upholding their high standards for service and food, even during the worst of the Pizzagate crisis (Hynum and Cray).

Maintain an open line of communication with your primary publics. This can be done by phone, like the City of Wood River, or by social media, like Comet Ping Pong (Maguire;

LaCapria). Maintaining communication will allow those in the affected publics to voice their concern and will allow the organization to speak with them directly.

Reach out to your media relationships. The relationships your organization's communication staff developed in the proactive stage are those most likely to be sympathetic to the organization in the time of crisis (Velez; Creaser). Reach out to them first, including non-journalist influencers.

Flood the market with real news telling positive stories (Arledge Powell). As social media gets saturated with negative news, says Lisa Arledge Powell, one of an organization's best defenses is countering the story with many other, truthful stories with positive narratives (Arledge Powell). Benoit suggests messages that bolster a positive image, suggesting Arledge Powell is correct (Benoit 179).

Get false and defamatory posts removed. Reach out to publishers and publishing platforms of fake news, especially publishers of misinformation, defamation, and anything that could harm the public (Bulawa Agudelo; Maguire; Hynum and Cray). Yelp locked Comet Ping Pong's Yelp page to prevent conspiracy-related bad reviews (LaCapria). Wood River was able to get the fake news site shut down through the threat of prosecution for endangering the public (Maguire). Starbucks was able to reach out to the misinformed captain who was responsible for the viral email, and the captain wrote an email to those to whom he sent his original email in order to correct the false perception (Snopes Staff).

Finally, consider legal action, if appropriate. By engaging law enforcement or legal counsel, an organization may find that they have a legal case for getting the fake news removed. Mayor Maguire considered pursuing copyright infringement before receiving legal counsel that the offending fake news was an endangerment to the public, and Planned Parenthood was able to

argue that certain states' attempts to defund their clinics were not legal given the arguments (Maguire; "DOJ").

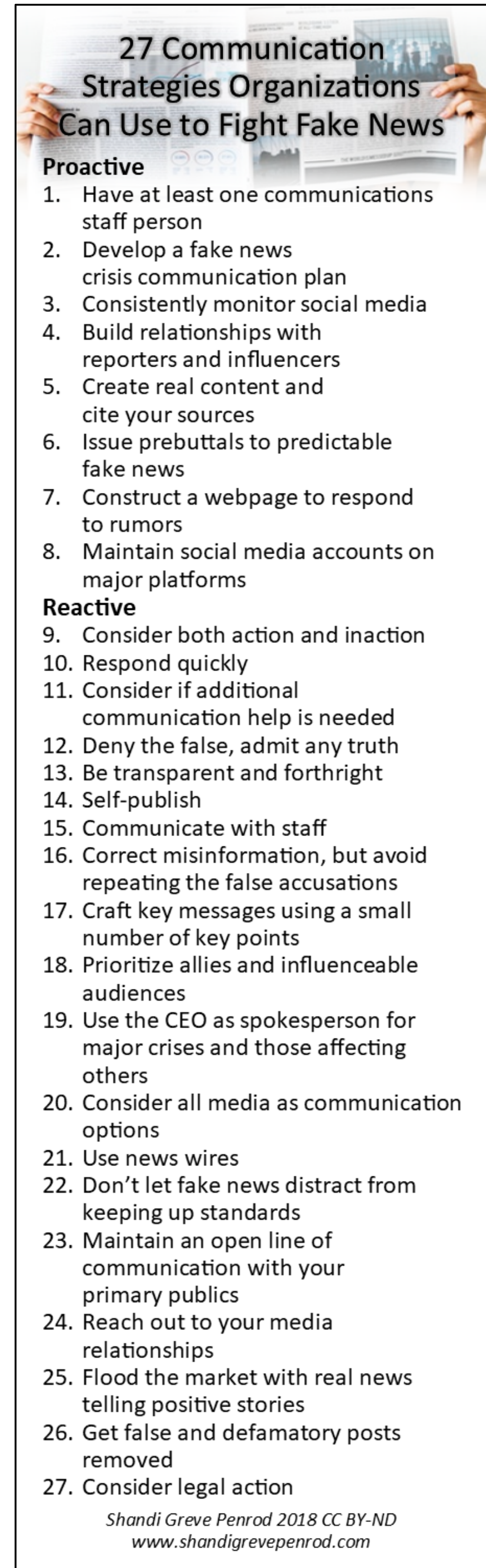

Figure 2. 27 Communication Strategies Organizations Can Use to Fight Fake News (@rawpixel)

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