FAKE NEWS

Cross Cultural Competence

SS22

Daniil Kovekh

Lisa Habersatter

Alexandra Irger

Laura Vollmar

1. Table of contents

2. Introduction

Deceptive news is a big problem, which comes along with the distribution of information. The distinction between what is real and what is not is getting harder and harder (Racsko 2021, 1). According to Schindler, Opuszko, and Stöbesand, fake news has become a well-known keyword in public, political, and scientific discourses (2021, 1). Hanley and Munoriyarwa state, that numerous alarming events happened due to the increase of false information on the internet. They argue, that the technological shifts of the 20th century and the last few decades, combined with the extension of communication possibilities through social networks and online platforms, widened the opportunities to spread fake news (2021, 1). In the following report, we want to provide a comprehensive overview of the definition, historicization, and development of fake news. Moreover, we emphasize its most common dimensions, and how you can spot them. Finally, we will show real examples related to fake news and how to prevent them.

3. Definition and characteristics of Fake News

According to Hanley and Munoriyarwa, fake news exists since humankind began communicating and sharing information (2021, 1). Schindler, Opuszko, and Stöbesand state, that "fake news" was first mentioned in lexicons in the US in the late 19th century and is often described as intentionally delusory information. Originally, the term referred to false news in the printed press, but today it is also applied to incorrect information on social media, to destabilize publications by news outlets, or to describe satire. (2021, 1)

The researchers Schindler et al. mention the possibility, that the distribution of fake news may occur unintentionally. But they also emphasize, that in comparison to lies, fake news is less socially motivated, such as protecting oneself or avoiding harm. The authors also admit, that besides the pure intention to disseminate deceptive information, there can be various

inducements, for example, financial goals, political ideologies, or promoting a specific person. For other authors, who are cited by Schindler et al. it is only valid to call false information "fake news", if the intended deception was successful. In other opinions, it does not have to succeed to be deemed as such, which is mentioned in their paper "Dimensions of Fake News", too. (2021, 1)

In addition, some definitions cited by Schindler et al. consider fake news to be completely wrong, in other words, that the news has no factual basis at all. According to them, the approach of high and low levels of facticity can be applied since the false information could be half-true or entirely false (2021, 1). Hanley and Munoriyarwa also distinguish between disinformation and misinformation. They describe disinformation as the distribution of incorrect information to intentionally mislead public opinion, for instance, lies, hoaxes, stories, and images spread on purpose to have a harmful effect. Mistakes, accidental sharing of incorrect or misleading news, not intended to have a damaging effect, can be seen as misinformation. (2021, 158) Besides that, Nöller introduces a third category, the so-called mal-information, which is based on truth, but used to harm an individual, organization, or country (2021, 35). In the next part of our report, we want to provide a comprehensive overview of the history and development of the phenomenon of fake news.

4.   History and development of Fake News

The first examples of fake news could be found in the preprinting press period in the form of rumors and false stories, as Hanley and Munoriyarwa describe in their paper "Fake News: Tracing the Genesis of a New Term and Old Practices". One example they mentioned happened during Emperor Ramesses II´s campaigns in Egypt against Nubians, Syrians, and Libyans in 1303 BCE, a rumor was spread which said that the emperor's army had been beaten

in combat by Sherden Sea pirates. At that time, this false information almost caused massive panic in the Kingdom (2021, 158–59).

After the introduction of the Gutenberg printing press in 1450, the propagation of literacy promoted the spread of news and knowledge additionally, according to the authors of "Dimensions of Fake News". They state that the commodification of information, due to the mass production of pamphlets, treatises, and books created the opportunity for false information to become part of the press and reach a larger audience (2021, 2). One case of printed fake news happened in 1835 in the US. The newspaper *New York Sun* published an article about creatures on the moon, which should look like a mixture of bats and humans. The news spread not only in the US but also in Europe. After a few publications about the topic, the newspaper revealed that it was fake (Nöller 2021, 37). This sensational story was reprinted by other papers and the daily sales of the *New York Sun* rose from about 4.000 to 19.000 pieces (Opuszko, Schindler, and Stöbesand 2021, 1).

Today, fake news is different from its former history due to the invention of the internet and the immediate worldwide distribution of information in the new media. The motivations for spreading fake news step up on a global scale and there are a lot of examples (Opuszko, Schindler, and Stöbesand 2021, 2), which we will examine in the third part of our report. But before, we want to introduce in the next paragraph the different types of fake news, which can occur in our daily life

5. Different types of Fake News

Fake News is a very broad term that is used for many different types of false information. Often the content is not even completely fake, but is manipulated, used in a wrong context, or omits important information about a certain topic. Thus, it is important to

differentiate various types of Fake News (Wardle 2020). In the following, a few of them will be described.

Satire and Parody are categorized as Fake News. Satirical information is content that uses humor and exaggeration to connect with the audience and jokes about news articles and current events (Watts 2018). There has been a lot of debates whether to include Satire under the term Fake News, since unlike other types of false information, they are not created to cause harm. The reason why it still has been considered as such is that people often lack the ability to identify satirical information and can be fooled easily into believing that the information is real (Wardle 2020).

The next type is Clickbait, which refers to stories that use eye-catching, sensational, or shocking headlines to attract attention. However, these headings are often misleading and do not reflect the content of the story, which can result in rumors that go viral. The purpose is to drive click-throughs and increase revenues (Kiely and Robertson 2016).

Propaganda is a form of communication that intends to alter the audience's beliefs, values, ideas, and opinions and is commonly paired with a strong political bias. Propagandists usually manipulate people's perception by appealing to their emotion (McKinnon, Haslett, and Thomison n. d.).

Manipulated Content refers to real stories where only a few aspects are changed or put together in a wrong context. Usually, it is photos and videos that are altered to create a false narrative and mislead the audience (Wardle 2020).

Finally, Fabricated Content, or also often referred to as Imposter Content, are stories that are completely made up and 100 per cent fake (Wardle 2020). Often the information is presented in the form of a news article or copies the identity of an established brand to create legitimacy (McKinnon, Haslett, and Thomison n. d.).

6.   How to spot Fake News?

It is important to pay attention when coming across new content to not be fooled into believing something that is not even true. Kiely and Robertson suggest a few steps one should consider when evaluating new information and that will help identifying fake news (2016).

It is crucial to analyze the source. Readers should check if they recognize the website and learn more about the author and his claimed expertise. One should not just read the headline. As mentioned above, many articles use misleading headings that often do not reflect the content. These headings usually are written in upper-case letters and use exclamation marks. Furthermore, the audience should collect more information on the topic and analyze the cites used in the article. If unsure whether the information is just a joke, one should see if the website is known for publishing satirical information. When evaluating new content, the reader should be aware of the confirmation bias. The concept says that people trust information more easily when it confirms their own opinions and are sceptic when it does not. Finally, there are many fact-checking sites that the reader can use to see if the information is verified (Kiely and Robertson 2016).

7.   Fake news in the US Information age

During the 2016 presidential campaigns, the term fake news drew up major attention due to Donald Trump's public expression of disbelief in media outlets. A shift occurred in the way media was distributed and consumed, making the user also a distributor and gatekeeper of content as opposed to media outlets which used to hold that privilege (Tong et. al. 2020, 1).

7.1.   In the context of social media

The following section is based on social media and Fake News in the 2016 Election by Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow. Social media has changed the way media is being consumed. A survey conducted by Gottfried and Shearer found, that 62% of US citizens of

legal age get their news through social media channels (2016). At the same time, social media offers a way to spread information with minimal costs (Allcott et. al. 2017, 221). Through the aggregation of data on the users, content can be centered around target groups, making it an ideal medium to connect to people who could potentially be interested in what you have to offer. It also offers the ideal platform to spread false information, especially when targeted around people whose ideological values align with the (false) content. Studies have shown that Facebook users only have a median share of 18-20% of Facebook "friends" with opposing political ideologies, which makes them prone to ideologically aligned content (Allcott et. al. 2017, 221).

Another study has shown that social media makes up 10.1% of all access to top news sites in the US (Allcott et. al. 2017, 222). On the contrary, with 41.8% of accesses through social media, fake news sites get their biggest amount of access that way (Allcott et. al. 2017, 222). It has also been shown in surveys that 13.8% of US citizens cited social media as their main source of information on the 2016 presidential election (Allcott et. al. 2017, 224).24).

7.2. 2016 presidential election

Fake news has been shown to be partisan (Allcott et. al. 2017, 223). Data has shown that there were three times as many Trump-favoring fake news articles than there were Clinton-favoring publications (Allcott et. al. 2017, 223). Also, Trump-favoring articles were shared more often than Clinton-favoring articles (Allcott et. al. 2017, 223).

It is commonly assumed that fake news has been pivotal in the result of the 2016 election (Allcott et. al. 2017, 232). However, scientifically proving this is difficult, as there is no definite way of determining what exactly brought people to their voting decisions.

Furthermore, Gorodnichenko, Pham and Talavera have shown that bots played a key role in the information flow of the 2016 U.S. presidential election and were used to energized voters (2021, 24).

7.3. Examples

One popular example of fake news was a misleading article alleging that pope Francis endorsed Trump (Allcott et. al. 2017, 214). It was published on WTOE 5 news — a satire website that put the fantasy disclaimer only in the "about" section — and shared over a million times on Facebook (Allcott et. al. 2017, 214). People surveyed by Allcott reported believing the headline (2017, 223).

Fake news has also shown to cause real life incidents. The #Pizzagate incident is one of those. When multiple email accounts of Democrats such as Clinton's head campaign manager John Podesta were hacked, a conspiracy theory emerged surrounding a pizza place in Washington DC, frequently mentioned by Podesta (Imamura n.d.). Conspiracists believed that it acted as a site for child sex trafficking (Imamura n.d.). After threats rose, a man from North Carolina decided to rescue the children and drove to DC to start a shooting in the pizza place (Imamura n.d.). Whilst nobody was hurt, this incident solidified the impact of fake news on the real world (Imamura n.d.).

When Sean Spicer, Trump's White House Press Secretary, made disproven claims about Trump's inauguration, Kellyanne Conway even coined another term for fake news — "alternative facts" — to defend him (Blake 2017).

7.4. During the presidency

During Trump's presidency he also contributed to the spread of fake news with numerous false or misleading claims. The Washington Post started recording his claims, totaling 30,573 false claims within his term as president (Kessler et. al. 2021). The peak was reached on November 2nd, 2020, a day before the 2020 presidential election, with 503 false or misleading claims made by him (Kessler et. al. 2021).

8. Prevention

8.1. Personally

Only 26% of adults (Amy Watson, 2021) are confident in their ability to recognize fake news. 47% of Americans were witnessing fake news in newspapers and magazines as of January 2019. Moreover, 10% of adults, who spread fake news, knew in advance that given news were fake (Amy Watson, 2021). As we see, majority of people can be deceived and can spread fake news themselves. That is why people should know how to spot fake news and not to spread the news the credibility of which cannot be proven.

8.2. Government

Informational and institutional resources are essential for citizens to counter uncertainties and fears, and better appreciate the current and future implications of the crisis. Government should provide credible information on its own sources (Shirish Srivastava et. al. 2021).

8.3. Social networks

False news is harmful to our community, it makes the world less informed, and it erodes trust. Facebook uses 3 prevention methods: builds new products to curb the spread of false news, helps people make more informed decisions when they encounter false news, and disrupts economic incentives (Adam Mosseri, 2017).

The best way to fight with fake news is to remove the economic incentives for traffickers of misinformation. Most of fake news is financially motivated. Fake news spammers make money by masquerading as legitimate news publishers and posting clickbait texts and images, that get people to visit their sites, which are often mostly ads (Adam Mosseri, 2017).

There are 9 ways to prevent spreading fake news by social media companies (Adam Mosseri, 2017):

- Identify false news through community and third-party fact-checking organizations so that we can limit its spread, which, in turn, makes it uneconomical.

- Making it difficult for people posting false news to buy ads on our platform through strict enforcement of our policies.

- Apply machine learning to detect fraudulent spam and delete it and block the user and similar accounts

- Updating our detection of fake accounts on Facebook, which makes spamming at scale much harder.

- See less content from unreliable resources in the feed

- Offenders that repeatedly share stories marked as false will no longer be allowed to advertise anything on the social network

- Building New Products and improvements:

- Mechanical fact checking for high audience accounts

- Social media and news agencies should unite and together remove the false content using the united database.

9. Conclusion

Fake news is a cheap way to spread information, that is valuable for a specific group of people. Fake news on a country level appeared in 1306 BCE. With the invention of printing, fake news started to flourish. There are 5 types of fake news: satire and parody, clickbait, propaganda, manipulated content, and fabricated content. It appeared, that Trump, during presidency, said more than 30 thousand lies, that means that even governors spread fake news. We learned how to recognize fake news and how to prevent spreading.

10. Personal Reflection

10.1. Laura Vollmar

Working on this topic, made me realize for how long the problem of false information exists in our society and that it is not only a problem of our day and age. Furthermore, it made me more aware of news, that is available on the internet because almost every article or source could be fake or delusory. In my opinion, the most useful to know is how to spot fake news and prevent yourself from the impact of it, since the consequences, which can occur through the distribution and consumption of fake news can be so harmful and scary.

10.2. Lisa Habersatter

Working on the topic Fake News was really insightful and made me realize how many false information is distributed daily. It helped me understand why people spread this type of information and what they want to achieve with that. Understanding different types of Fake News makes it a lot easier to spot them and distinguish between real and false information. In the future, I will definitely be more careful when evaluating new information.

10.3. Daniil Kovekh

Fake news is a huge problem of humanity. People don't know how to protect themselves from it. After working on this paper, I have learned about methods of preventing the fake news. I also started to look other way on the events that happen in politics and economics.

10.4. Alexandra Irger

While I was living close to DC throughout the 2016 election and Trump's first half year as president, I already knew about a lot about the fake news surrounding the campaigns, how they affected debates and how emotional this election was for so many US citizens. However, I did not know a lot about the actual fake news that spread around conservative social circles.

Before this report I had never heard about #Pizzagate and the pope article. I was shocked about how people believed these things. It helped me grasp the bigger picture surrounding fake news and made me arguably more empathetic for people, who's ideological values and beliefs are so strong that they would be disillusioned by those fake stories. At the same time, I now know to double check the sources which I draw information from twice, and mostly to stick to familiar and reputable news sources (especially when on social media) to get my information from.

11. Bibliography

Allcott, Hunt, and Matthew, Gentzkow. "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election". *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 31, no.2 (2017): 211-36.

Blake, Aaron. "Kellyanne Conway Says Donald Trump's Team Has 'Alternative Facts.' Which Pretty Much Says It All." The Washington Post. WP Company, January 22, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/01/22/kellyanne-conway-says-donald-trumps-team-has-alternate-facts-which-pretty-much-says-it-all/.

Gorodnichenko, Yuriy, Tho Pham, and Oleksandr Talavera. "Social media, sentiment and public opinions: Evidence from #Brexit and #USElection". *European Economic Review* 136 (2021): 103772.

Gottfried, Jeffrey, and Elisa Shearer. "News Use across Social Media Platforms 2016." Pew Research Center's Journalism Project. Pew Research Center, May 26, 2016. https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2016/05/26/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2016/.

Hanley, Monika, und Allen Munoriyarwa. 2021. „Fake News: Tracing the Genesis of a New Term and Old Practices". In *Digital Roots*, herausgegeben von Gabriele Balbi, Nelson Ribeiro, Valérie Schafer, und Christian Schwarzenegger, 157–76. De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110740202-009.

Imamura, Takashi. "19 Real Events Caused by Fake News in the US." Marubeni Corporation — Dispatches from the Potomac. Marubeni America Corporation. Accessed April 7, 2022. https://www.marubeni.com/en/research/potomac/backnumber/19.html.

Kessler, Glenn, Salvador Rizzo, and Meg Kelly. "Analysis | Trump's False or Misleading Claims Total 30,573 over 4 Years." The Washington Post. WP Company, January

24, 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/01/24/trumps-false-or-misleading-claims-total-30573-over-four-years/.

Kiely, Eugene, and Lori Robertson. "How to Spot Fake News." FactCheck.org, November 18, 2016. https://www.factcheck.org/2016/11/how-to-spot-fake-news/.

McKinnon, Lori, Diana Haslett, and Julianne Thomison. "Lesson 2: Fake News Content." The Arthur W. Page Center. Accessed March 27, 2022. https://www.pagecentertraining.psu.edu/public-relations-ethics/introduction-to-the-ethical-implications-of-fake-news-for-pr-professionals/lesson-2-fake-news-content/.

Mosseri, Adam. "Working-to-stop-misinformation-and-false-news". Facebook, April 7 2017.

https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwjK1YmUhYT3AhUQO-wKHZRACk4QFnoECAgQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2Fformedia%2Fblog%2Fworking-to-stop-misinformation-and-false-news&usg=AOvVaw0dFMqjlEW9mHkrYSIxu9w2

Nöller, Thomas. 2021. *Verschwörungstheorien und Fake News: Untersuchungen unter dem Fokus systemischen Denkens und Handelns*. BestMasters. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-35748-1.

Opuszko, Marek, Paulina Schindler, und Meena Stöbesand. 2021. „Dimensions of Fake News". *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4030762.

Pew Research Center. "Share of adults who have ever shared fake news or information online in the United States as of March 2019". Statista, June 2019.

https://www.statista.com/statistics/657111/fake-news-sharing-online/

Racsko, Peter. 2021. „Fake News Identification". *Society and Economy*, November. https://doi.org/10.1556/204.2021.00020.

Srivastava, Shirish. "How governments can take actionst fake news propensity". Hec Paris, May 4, 2021. https://www.hec.edu/en/knowledge/articles/how-governments-can-take-actions-against-fake-news-propensity

Tong, Chau, Hyungjin Gill, Jianing Li, Sebastián Valenzuela, and Hernando Rojas. ""Fake News Is Anything They Say!" — Conceptualization and Weaponization of Fake News among the American Public". Mass Communication and Society 23, no.5 (2020): 755-778.

Wardle, Claire. "Understanding Information Disorder." First Draft, September 22, 2020. https://firstdraftnews.org/long-form-article/understanding-information-disorder/.

Watson, Amy. "Fake news in the U.S. - Statistics & Facts". Statista, June 2021. https://www.statista.com/topics/3251/fake-news/#topicHeader__wrapper

Watts, Nicola. "5 Types of 'Fake News' and Why They Matter." Ogilvy, July 5, 2018. https://www.ogilvy.com/ideas/5-types-fake-news-why-they-matter.