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ABSTRACT

“Fake news” is an increasing global issue because of its potential influence on public opinion. In order to understand exactly what is meant by “fake news,” the first section will provide context and definitions of the term. In section two, the authors provide a historical look at the spread of disinformation, which notably began in the 1800s. Section three will underscore the crucial role of the social media ecosystem, especially its algorithmic filtering, in the dissemination of disinformation. This section will also explain why entertainment plays a vital role in the spreading of “fake news” and why platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are referred to as the modern public sphere. The following sections will provide insight into how media outlets such as Associated Press and The New York Times are dealing with disinformation and will emphasize why local reporting plays a crucial role in counteracting “fake news.” In this context, the authors outline how local news agencies and reporters covered the deadly Charlottesville “Unite the Right” rally in August 2017 and how they dealt with false information. Section five will present the perspective of German journalists. They emphasize that the different media systems in Germany and the USA have to be taken into account when discussing the underlying problem. In section six, solutions for dealing with "fake news" are presented. The communicative and technical potential of the Internet must now be taken into account in the realization of journalistic content. An important task of editorial offices is the balance between a "flood of information" as well as the verification of information (image, video, text material) on the Internet. Journalists today need to know how to verify information on the web. Editorial offices should keep their reporting as transparent as possible and communicate background information and research to their readers in an understandable way. This also includes a comprehensive editorial quality check and quality assurance.

INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the Journalism in the Era of Disinformation Fellowship (JED) eight students from Germany and eight American students participated in a weeklong program in the United States of America to discuss the trend of “fake news” and the influence of disinformation on journalism and political coverage in both countries. From May 19 through the 25, the young journalists traveled together from Washington, D.C. to Charlottesville, Virginia and New York City. The participants met their peers, visited media outlets like Associated Press and The New York Times and discussed their questions and ideas concerning disinformation with experts from different media fields. The aim of the program is to discuss threats posed by “fake news” and to find solutions to counteract the influence of disinformation in both countries.

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1. DISSEMINATION OF FAKE NEWS AND DISINFORMATION

"Fake news" differ from each other in content as well as intentionality. Therefore it is difficult to define "fake news" as a congruent term. Especially since the consignors, the distribution platform and the form of presentation of such fake news vary greatly. "Fake news" is not a homogeneous form of (fake) reports or information. What is referred to as "fake news" can be:

- Disinformation (e.g. by concerns, parties, organizations)
- Propaganda (e.g. by governments)
- Hoax (e.g. by private individuals, blog operators)
- Rumor (e.g. by the Yellow Press)
- Urban legends (e.g. by private individuals, parties)
- Satire (e.g. by satirists, press, news websites)

These examples show how false information referred to as "fake news” also differs diametrically in its scope: If the purpose of disseminating disinformation is to influence public opinion in order to achieve certain political or economic goals, satire is an art form that is about criticizing political or social grievances in order to make the public aware of them. This circumstance illustrates how important it is to view the content referred to as "fake news" in a differentiated way, to classify it adequately and to name it accordingly.

The different forms of "fake news" lead to a definitional problem. Thus, even in science or among experts and journalists, there is no uniform definition of the term. In a recent research study by Stanford University and New York University on the influence of "fake news" on the presidential election in the United States in 2016, "fake news" is defined as “news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers” (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 213). The researchers emphasize that some forms of appearance of “fake news” are excluded from the definition:

> "1) unintentional reporting mistakes [...]; 2) rumors that do not originate from a particular news article; 3) conspiracy theories [...]; 4) satire that is unlikely to be misconstrued as factual; 5) false statements by politicians; and 6) reports that are slanted or misleading but not outright false [...]" (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 214).

However, since these definitions are often referred to as "fake news," this definition does not sufficiently cover the term. Victoria Rubin, Yimin Chen and Niall Conroy of the University of Western Ontario take a different approach. They have defined three types of "fake news" and investigated to what extent they could serve as a corpus for automated text analysis to identify "fake news" (Rubin, Chen & Conroy, 2015):

> "a) serious fabrications (uncovered in mainstream or participant media, yellow press or tabloids); b) large-scale hoaxes; c) humorous fakes (news satire, parody, game shows).".

Rubin et al. opine that the yellow press, for example, disseminates a number of unconfirmed reports by making use of "clickbaiting" headlines, exaggerations as well as scandal and sensationalism. Hoaxes, on the other hand, are one-off forgeries that are scattered on various platforms, such as social media. Hoaxes would pretend to be news in order to deliberately deceive the audience and thus cause them material damage. News satire, on the other hand, is a genre that emulates real reports from credible news sources (cf. Rubin, Chen & Conroy, 2015). But also Rubin et al. disregard propaganda and disinformation as forms of "fake news". Yet these are especially dangerous for a democracy and therefore indispensable to mention. However, Rubin et al. emphasize the necessity of dividing "fake news" into different categories.

Another approach to define "fake news" was chosen by a group of researchers at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore: Tandoc, Lim and Ling (2017) defined and operationalized the term "fake news" based on analyzing 34 scholarly articles published between 2003 and 2017 that used the term. The analysis identified six different ways how the examined studies that were mainly conducted in the United States from a journalistic perspective have operationalized "fake news": "satire, parody, fabrication, manipulation, propaganda, and advertising" (Tandoc, Lim & Ling, 2017, p.141).

News satire (e.g. mock news programs like *The Daily Show* or *heute Show* in Germany) is the most common operationalization regarding the examined studies. "These programs are typically focused on current affairs and often use the style of a television news broadcast [...] [but] promote themselves as delivering entertainment first and foremost rather than information" (Tandoc, Lim & Ling, 2017), which is also made clear by the job title of the hosts. Traditional newscasters call themselves journalists whereas hosts often choose the title of comedian or entertainer. Calling political news satire "fake news" refers to the format (humor, exaggerated style, laughter, eccentric faux reporting, etc.) (Tandoc, Lim & Ling, 2017). "However, the core content of political satires are based on actual events" (p.142).

A second format the examined studies have referred to is *News Parody* (e.g. satire websites/magazines like *The Onion* in the US or *Titanic* in Germany). Similar to satire, parody uses humorous information to reach the audience. But whereas satire refers to actual events and communicates their non-journalism role, parodies only hint it and use non-factual, fictitious and absurd information to evoke humor (cf. ibid.). This may lead to misinformation, such as the

article published by a chinese paper calling Kim Jong Un “sexiest man alive” according to a “report” in *The Onion* (cf. BBC, 2012).

News Fabrication (e.g. *Breitbart News* in the US or *RT Deutsch* in Germany) as third operationalization has another intention than the two mentioned first: misinformation – which can be achieved by spreading false information in the style of news articles on a website, on blogs or social media platforms (cf. ibid.). “There are two relatively new dimensions to the issue of news fabrication. One is the financial motive of the author; the other is the development of news bots that give the illusion of widespread acceptance of a news item” (ibid., p.143).

Financial gain is also a main goal of *advertising materials* and *press releases* using the guise of genuine news reports and have therefore also been identified as the fourth operationalization of “fake news” in previous studies. Similar to Advertising and PR, *Propaganda* has been seen as “fake news” in regard to its bias promoting “a particular side or perspective. Such blending of news and commentary, [...] hides behind the appropriation of being an objective piece of news; however, the goal is often to persuade rather than to inform” (ibid. p.147).

Manipulation or *misappropriation* of real images or videos is the fifth format the term for “fake news.”. Visual news are changed (e.g. by removing or inserting persons/things into images) or taken out of its original context to create false narratives (cf. ibid.).

All these definitions have in common that “fake news” correspond to “the look and feel of real news” (ibid., p.147). But they differ in degrees of two dimensions: facticity and the intention to mislead as shown in the table below:

Table 1. A Typology of Fake News Definitions, Tandoc et al. (2017), p.148

	Author's immediate intention to deceive	
Level of facticity	**High**	**Low**
High	Native advertising Propaganda Manipulation	News satire
Low	Fabrication	News parody

But what is missing in this attempt to define the term “fake news” is the role of the audience, which can co-construct “fake news” by perceiving fake as real and sharing it on social media (cf. ibid).

This is one point of how Claire Wardle, a media scholar at Shorenstein Center at Harvard Kennedy School, describes the dynamics of “fake news”. She categorizes seven types of “fake news” – or as she is referring to it: “misinformation (the inadvertent sharing of false information) and disinformation (the deliberate creation and sharing of information known to be false)”:

> “1) satire or parody […]; 2) misleading content (misleading use of information to frame an issue or individual); 3) imposter content (when genuine sources are impersonated); 4) fabricated content (new content is 100% false, designed to deceive and do harm); 5) false connection (when headlines, visuals or captions don’t support the content); 6) false

> context (when genuine content is shared with false contextual information); 7) manipulated content (when genuine information or imagery is manipulated to deceive)" (Wardle, 2017).

Wardle emphasizes that the difficulty of defining "fake news" or at least finding an appropriate alternative term for it is not only its appearance as a news, but due to the entire information ecosystem – which she breaks down into three elements:

> "1. The different types of content that are being created and shared
> 2. The motivations of those who create this content
> 3. The ways this content is being disseminated" (Wardle 2017).

Here, the third point in particular is important: Wardle figures that especially social networks play a crucial role in the dissemination of "fake news." Misinformation or disinformation can be directly targeted at users who are prone to share these information without verifying. Once users share some kind of false information, the next user who sees it is presumably more likely to trust it and then share it once again (cf. ibid.). A survey conducted in 2016 for the news and entertainment site BuzzFeed shows that "75 % of American adults who were familiar with a fake news headline viewed the story as accurate" (Silverman & Singer-Vine, 2016). The Ipsos poll also found that respondents who rely primary on other platforms for news than Facebook are less likely "to view fake news headlines as accurate" (ibid.) than respondents citing Fakebook as a major news source (cf. ibid.).

Similar to Wardle the German journalist Fabian Reinbold (2017) stresses the "dynamics of the social media [which made 'fake news'] a powerful and dangerous phenomenon in the first place": He refers to "fake news" when "false information is deliberately produced and disseminated – and composed in such a way that it exploits the logics of the social media" (ibid.). Reinbold as well as Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) point that "fake news" is spread out of financial and political/ideological interests. Therefore, it is important "not to lump traditional phenomena such as gossip magazines [...], conspiracy theories [...], [or] urban legends [...] into the 'fake news' pot [...], [since these] do not [draw] their power from the new dynamics of social networks" (ibid.).

Based on the previous definitions and preliminary considerations, the term "fake news" can be summarized as follows:

> The term "fake news" refers to an Internet phenomenon and is often used as a collective term for invented and fake messages of any kind that spread on the Internet. "Fake news" differ both in content and intention: Consignors, distribution platform and form of presentation can diverge diametrically. Therefore, "fake news" is not a homogeneous form of "fake" or false information and the term is not congruent. But in the narrower sense "fake news" are false information deliberately produced and disseminated in social media by various actors for political or commercial reasons – and can therefore be termed as disinformation.

2. THE HISTORY OF FAKE NEWS IN THE UNITED STATES

Disinformation is not a new or even recent development. The spread of disinformation notably began in the 1800s, according to historian, author and media professional Dr. Cindy Gueli (2018), and continues to occur in cycles as fake news commonly feeds off of identity crises among people or groups and at times when politics or social norms change. Since the 1800s, many historical events have shown that politics and social changes provoke the spread of fake news.

During the 1800 presidential election, incumbent President John Adams of the federalist party was defeated by Vice President Thomas Jefferson. The schemes and lies pitted against each candidate by their opponent are significant examples of the early spread of disinformation, specifically for political gain. James Callender, a political writer and newspaper editor in the late 1700s, wrote pamphlets supporting the Republican Party and Jefferson. Jefferson secured Callender with a job at The Aurora, a Republican newspaper, where Callender began writing pamphlets attacking federalist leaders (information aggregated by Monticello.org, n.d.). At this point in time, the power of written news stories was strong, and fact-checking by readers was not, giving disinformation free reign among readers.

In 1836, around the beginning of the Victorian Age, penny press newspapers gained popularity. The inexpensive, tabloid-like newspapers were mass produced and began circulating in the U.S. throughout the 1830s and beyond. These papers marked the ascent to yellow journalism by using eye-catching titles with little to no legitimate, honest news stories inside. The sensational headlines of the newspapers were successful, with circulation growing from 2,000 to 15,000 rather quickly, according to Gueli (2018).

The 1886 Haymarket Riot in Chicago on May 4 marked the beginning of an anarchic movement. During this post Civil War industrial revolution, classes of people could mainly be classified as either the super rich or super poor. With a rise in immigration came a rising fear of immigration in the U.S. as jobs became scarce. This period marked not only a rise in immigration, but also of nativism, the KKK and the Know-Nothing party. The heightened fear of immigrants and the dividing characteristics and beliefs of Americans created a fear of change in society, which, as Dr.Gueli pointed out, heightens the spread of disinformation in the media.

McCarthyism in the 1950s displayed how disinformation works off of people's fears. Elected to the senate in 1946, McCarthy rose to prominence when in a speech he claimed that there were communists infiltrating the U.S. government. McCarthy became a polarizing figure in American politics in the 1950s because of his subsequent investigations of various governmental departments and questioning people on their affiliations with the communist party (Achter, 2018). McCarthy was unable to make substantiated claims that the people he interrogated were communists, and the term “McCarthyism” is now affiliated with the act of making accusations against people without regard for substantial evidence.

In an antidote to disinformation, the Pentagon Papers, a 47-volume document photocopied and sent to the New York Times in 1971, exposed the U.S. government of lying to the American people regarding U.S. involvement in the war. Published at a time during the Vietnam War when support for U.S. intervention was rapidly declining, the papers confirmed the suspicions of the people who were skeptical of the active role the U.S. government had taken in building up the war (A&E, 2011). The Pentagon Papers did not expose the media for spreading disinformation, but rather the media exposed the government for lying to the American people

about U.S. involvement in the war. Professor Gueli used the example of the Pentagon Papers in her lecture to illustrate a pivotal moment in history for transparency and freedom of the press. The landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision *New York Times Co. v. the United States* designates a historical moment for the First Amendment and further professionalization of the news media.

As shown throughout history, the creation and spread of disinformation ebbs and flows, coming in cycles in response to changes in politics and government. As we continue to examine disinformation, misinformation and the term "fake news," it's important to take a step back and analyze the state of the U.S. as well as the world. With the Trump presidency, the term "fake news" grew in popularity and people are using it as a defense tactic against news articles that they disagree with or that are misleading to the general public. It's encouraging to realize that we've been here before when it comes to what seems like the peak of disinformation, but also discouraging to see that throughout history, disinformation continues to spread.

3. SOCIAL MEDIA AND FAKE NEWS IN 'THE NEW PUBLIC SQUARE'

While the Internet's role in spreading and exacerbating fake news is undeniable, the details and that relationship are rarely defined or understood. What became increasingly clear during the fellowship was that the rise of social media use specifically has created an ecosystem in which disinformation can thrive and spread more widely than ever before. The modern "fake news" phenomenon would not have been possible without social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, YouTube, and many others. These platforms are susceptible to bad actors, widespread confusion, and even orchestrated information-based attacks, thanks to a few of the key features that set them apart from the rest of the internet in the first place.

The first, and perhaps most uniquely dangerous feature of social media is the technology's use of and reliance upon algorithms to serve users content specially tailored to fit their perceived interests and sensibilities. Many experts point out that these algorithms inadvertently reinforce divisive and polarizing views along the way, by placing users in "echo chambers" where their beliefs are never challenged or disproven. "We talk a lot about media bias, but we don't talk enough about viewer bias," explained Michelle Lipkin (2018), the Executive Director of the National Association for Media Literacy Education. "Humans naturally have a cognitive bias, and social media made us all participants in this system of never questioning that bias." These echo chambers often result in exposing users to more polarizing views, and pushing them deeper into their silos, while widening the political divide.

The encouraging of anonymity or otherwise lack of identity verification is another hugely impactful aspect of the social media ecosystem that allows fake news to flourish online. The fact that anyone with an internet connection can anonymously reach millions of people – or worse, impersonate another individual, publication or organization – at any time is an inherent flaw in the social media infrastructure, where so many companies claim to aspire to make users feel more "connected" with one another. Many experts and analysts began referring to these sites and apps as the modern public square, where anyone is free to speak their piece and (reasonably) be heard by others. What this analogy fails to recognize, however, is that the ability to mask or obscure one's identity with the push of a few buttons is unique to the internet, and must be

uniquely addressed. In the same way that local municipalities monitor and in many cases establish reasonable limitations upon the use of the public square, we must also regulate these online spaces.

These features, along with several others, have allowed and even emboldened the fake news phenomenon to take shape, and the lasting effects of the impact they've had on democracy and news literacy around the world is yet to be fully realized.

Additionally, social media has helped to shape the public's relationship with media. In the case of Keneka Jenkins, a young woman found dead at a local hotel in Chicago back in October 2017, social media found itself in its own personal newsroom. Social media users became detectives, private investigators, and even journalists overnight to discover inconsistencies in stories being told (Kielman, J. & Rosenberg-Douglas, K., 2017). The same is true for the viral story of Keaton Jones, a young man who fell victim to bullying. Social media discovered facts about Jones' family that angered social media to the point that caused Go Fund Me, a popular crowd fundraising site, to shut down an account started in his name (Schugerman, 2017).

These stories appealed to the public's emotional state and set of a whirlwind of "fake news" and created more of what is called "citizen journalism." Some citizen journalists did not do their due diligence to make sure the public was equipped with the truth and not letting one narrative shape the public's view point. Local and national news organizations fell victim to their narrative and ran with it which made people that did want to fact check believe the stories of their peers.

Entertainment plays a vital role in the life of "fake news" and if we want to look at the history of disinformation in the media, we must be willing to look at the underlying problem. Rumors spread faster than the truth. While it may seem that majority want the media to fix the problem of disinformation, there are still a good amount that want entertainment over reality.

Social media as a whole is being used as a way to keep the public updated on the condition of different communities around the world. It helps people become more aware of global trends and keep them engaged and informed on cultures they are not familiar with. There are hashtags, threads, and viral content on what the community thinks about certain issues within minutes. People no longer have to stay up and wait until anchors and reporters talk about it on the nightly news. Journalists and readers are able to find things out by just picking up phones, tablets, or laptops no matter where they are.

With such an improvement on how news is distributed, we find that many solely depend on social media in the era of disinformation, and this may have consequences such as audience fragmentation and confirmation bias. One of the things that hinders how people get news, is the way some media outlets use social media to gain an audience. When appealing to the masses, distributors of information are looking to hit audiences emotionally. People want to feel something…even if that means being emotionally attached to a lie. The KQED-produced video titled "Why do our brains love fake news?" — which JED fellows reviewed during a media literacy workshop — gives an excellent explainer on how neuro-biochemistry is susceptible to the strong emotions provoked by so-called "fake news" stories, often circulated on social media. When evaluating information, the emotional-processing portions of our brains — which then give us a rush of dopamine — may be more active than our reasoning centers of the brain (00:02:42-00:03:00). This may be one explanation of why we hit the "like" and "share" buttons so often on circulating disinformation that confirms our emotional stance.

According to a Massachusetts Institute of Technology study, false news travels faster than real news on Twitter. The authors tracked 126,000 stories tweeted by roughly 3 million people more than 4.5 million times, and found that false news stories are 70 percent more likely to be retweeted. Furthermore, they found, it takes six times longer for real news stories to reach 1,500 people as it does for false news to reach the same amount (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). (Notice, they did not use the term “fake news,” which we have mentioned has been defined and redefined in social context over the years. Their researched was fact checked by different organizations like PolitiFact and FactCheck.org, and it covers Twitter lifespan from the time it was founded in 2006 up until 2017.)

4. HOW TO COUNTERACT FAKE NEWS

4.1 How Associated Press and The New York Times deal with fake news

As the society is provided with the latest news by various free web portals, the journalists’ tasks of informing and watching the society have been added by verifying online information and correcting digital falsehoods. “Disinformation is going hand in hand with the decline of the gatekeeper system,” said John Daniszewski (2018), Vice President for Standards at the AP news agency. Among many trustworthy news outlets, there are some websites which spread inaccurate reports. One way the Associated Press avoids this risk is by having reporters and editors in a variety of location in order to produce original, accurate journalism. Additionally, if an error is made, a strict policy for correcting the record is followed by the AP, and that includes publishing their corrections via the internet and social media channels. To fulfill that mission, they need to monitor the web continuously. Journalists outside of the AP can and should follow these standards.

For journalists who do not work for robust, well-staffed media outlets like the AP or the The New York Times, a variety of free tools online can help discern facts from fiction.For example, they can check if unverified video footage was taken from another video covering another topic. Furthermore, they can check if a picture of an unknown person was published before in another context. According to Daniszewski (2018), AP has employed station reporters in many regions especially for checking information. But it wouldn’t be possible to avoid publishing hoaxes by accident. “Basically we rely on the accuracy of the information going in. But we have to monitor and correct our stories permanently”, Daniszewski said. For saving the journalistic reputation - especially in an environment of various free news outlets - transparent workflows cannot be wrong.

According to Justin Bank (2018), Editor for Internet and Audience at The New York Times, most modern reporters start research with a Google search. Only as a second step, they would look for phone connections. However, on the internet, journalists can find a mass of unknown sources so that they need to more precisely if an online contact is trustworthy. “Especially regarding leaked information, the coverage is more than ever based on trust,” Bank said (2018).

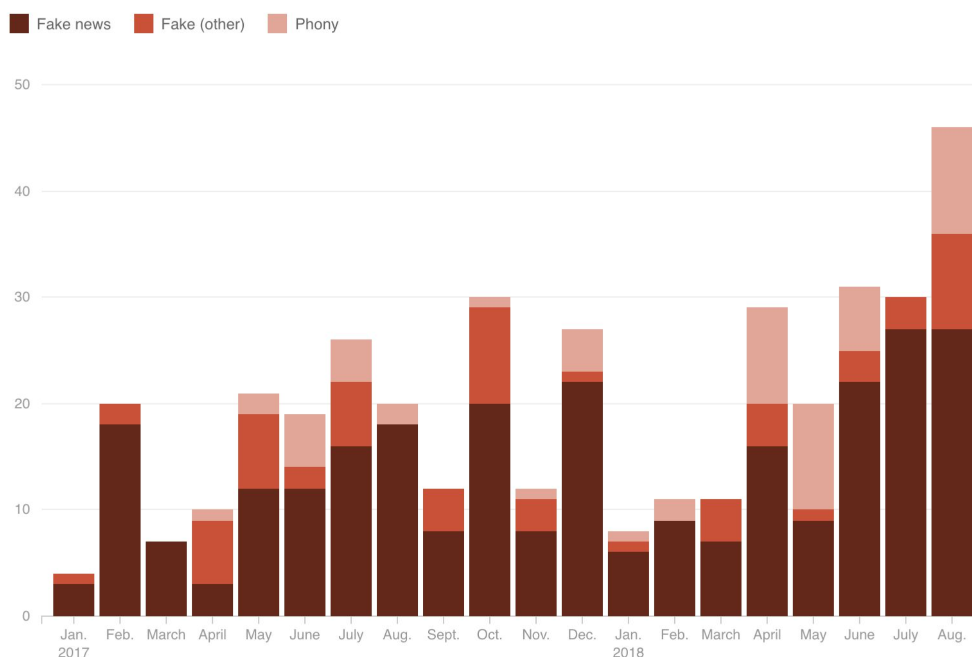
Additionally, reporters themselves should be cautious in what they publish online outside of their news outlet channels. They should be aware that all online communication can be used against them. In her scientific report on covering online extremists, antagonists and manipulators, digital media expert Whitney Phillips (2018) points out that "in fact anything reporters say publicly or even semi-privately about a particular story and/or subject, may be used against the reporter and their publication" (p. 16).

4.2 Meeting the misinformed where they are: Using digital campaigns and local reporting to combat disinformation

Following the 2016 presidential election, the term "fake news" became a semi-official term in national politics, through both a technical and rhetorical definition. And after its inscription into everyday dialect, media representatives, politicians and organizations recognized the pressing need to address and combat the implications of "fake news" — both as rhetorical and technical terms. Rhetorically, United States President Donald Trump has used the term "fake news" to refer to media coverage he personally and politically disagrees with. Often using Twitter to convey his disagreement with prominent news agencies such as The New York Times, the Washington Post and CNN, Trump commonly aligns his "fake news" accusations with the current news cycle.

National news agencies are combatting the effects of Trump's statements by documenting and publishing records of how and when he uses such terms. From January 2017 through August 2018, NPR documented that the president used terms like "fake news," "fake," or "phony" when referring to the media nearly 400 times, with a high of 46 individual counts in August of 2018 (Keith, 2008).

Figure 1. Trump's Tweets Including The Words 'Fake' Or 'Phony.'



Other media organizations have taken their own measures to address the concerning damage to their reputation. The Columbia Journalism Review published “The Real Perils of Trump’s numbing ‘fake news’ routine,” which analyzes the concerning connection between the president’s speech to a decrease in public trust in the media (Vernon, 2018). Poynter Institute (2017) also released a discouraging study that underscored the direct effect between Trump’s media opinions and the waning trust in the field. By taking the time to study, document and publish the connection between “fake news” rhetoric and public impact, nonpartisan news organizations are taking a giant leap in reaching audiences most directly affected by the president’s messages.

While the president’s rhetoric has a particularly profound impact on his supportive, conservative base, the more technical, digital spreading of “fake news” has a deeply sinister and conspiratorial effect because it can target and affect more than just the president’s listeners.

Digital campaigns run by foreign actors are often responsible for the dissemination of “fake news,” and disinformation. There’s an increasing need in the United States for a close monitoring and national platform to document how and when disinformation reaches its audience. To start, the New York Times (2018) launched its own digital campaign so readers can submit their personal experiences encountering false information online. Using an online submission form, users can describe social media disinformation and “sketchy” digital campaign ads they come across on a variety of platforms.

Figure 2. New York Times Reader Submission Form.

Use this form to send tips to Times reporters

Please be sure you’ve read the sections above on what to submit (and what not to submit).

What is your name?
First and last preferred, please.

What is your email?

Relevant link
If there's a URL associated with the content you're submitting, please enter it here. If you have more than one link, please enter the others in the notes field below.

YOU HAVE **255** CHARACTERS LEFT.

Leave us a note.
Tell us what you saw and why you think it's suspicious

YOU HAVE **300** WORDS LEFT.

Upload a screenshot
Not sure how to take a screenshot? See the instructions below.

Drag an image here or click to browse for an image on your computer

The Associated Press (2018) also partnered with Facebook to "debunk election misinformation" on the social media site, which is a famous favorite for circulating false information online. According to the renowned and nonpartisan AP, its journalists "will fact-check national, state and local election-related stories on Facebook, supplying related AP news stories that debunk misinformation, validate a story as true, or provide additional background and context."

Not only is it growing more imperative to reach victims of disinformation online, but it's effective to reach audiences in their physical locations through local reporting. Local reporters maintain an imperative role in their communities, and can reach their audiences more effectively than national outlets can. These journalists are more adept at creating and maintaining sources, recognizing what are untold narratives, reaching unrecognized populations, understanding more deeply complex and nuanced community issues and can build background information that proves essential to stories.

In an August 2018 Poynter study, researchers found that audiences trust their local news partners to a much higher degree than national organizations.

According to the nonpartisan Poynter study,

"Key findings include:

- 76% of Americans trust local television news
- 73% trust local newspapers
- 59% trust national newspapers
- 55% trust national network news
- 47% trust online-only news outlets" (Dyakon & Grau, 2018).

According to Val Thompson, news director for CBS-19 in Charlottesville, Va., the station's local reporting made all the difference during a contentious Aug. 11 and 12, 2017 rally in the city.

National media and public attention focused on Charlottesville during a "Unite the Right" protest during which protesters gathered downtown to rally against the removal of a Robert E. Lee statue in a city park. In the midst of the protest, rioting broke out between white nationalists and counter-protesters that resulted in the death of a woman named Heather Heyer, a counter-protester (Wrabel, 2017). Thompson said that his news team was able to swiftly respond to the protests because the station's journalists knew the community, understood the tensions leading up to the protests, had attended city council meetings, and were privy to the political sensitivities of Charlottesville.

Other local news organizations credited with earning the public's trust include models like the Texas Tribune, based in Austin, Texas. As a nonprofit, nonpartisan news agency, the Tribune claims itself as the "only member-supported, digital-first, nonpartisan media organization that informs Texans — and engages with them — about public policy, politics, government and statewide issues" (n.d.). The Tribune's news coverage, combined with intensive data reporting, partnerships with national media, and its famous "Tribune Festival" has rocketed the organization to a top-tier position among some of the strongest local reporting in the nation. The national investigative news network, ProPublica, has also partnered with local news

agencies to support their work during "important investigative projects affecting their communities. Topics include conflicts of interest, housing, mental health care, criminal justice and workplace safety" (Ornstein, 2018).

By partnering with larger networks, local news organizations can benefit from the funding, public recognition and journalistic manpower from national organizations. Ultimately, this can lead to deeper investigative reporting, more ambitious projects, increased hiring and more in-depth journalism that increases trust in the media and supports communities most targeted, influenced and impacted by disinformation.

4.3 Media Literacy Across Generations is Imperative

According to the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE), "media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication" (National Association for Media Literacy, n.d.a). In the wake of the world wide web and a global marketing infrastructure that targets all age groups, it is imperative that both youth and adults are equipped with the literacy skills to decipher and critically analyze media. Media refers to electronic, digital, and or print messaging and visuals including traditional outlets like television, radio, newspapers, etc. in addition to more contemporary formats like text messages, social networking sites, and mobile applications. From a macro level, the landscape of media has expanded into a deeply sophisticated world of targeted advertising designed to spread message and information. These platforms are not inherently bad, but they do have the potential to be weaponized to spread disinformation.

All media content is created by someone. That someone has a motive. When media consumers are devoid of a critical lens to ask where that motive originates, we lessen our ability to detect disinformation. By incorporating media literacy into our education system and normalizing this very concept, it shifts the conversation and practice away from thoughtless consumption and instead emphasizes a critical understanding of what is actually being communicated.

NAMLE suggests a series of key questions to ask when analyzing media messages. They are divided into ten categories: authorship, purpose, economics, impact, response, content, techniques, interpretations, context, and credibility.

Figure 3. NAMLE Reference Questions.

WHO made this?

WHY was it made?

WHAT is missing from this message?

HOW might different people interpret this message?

WHO might benefit from this message?

WHO might be harmed by this message?

By questioning these influences and outcomes of any media, the goal is to encourage reflection and increase engagement in a democratic society given the fact that media is ubiquitous in the world today (National Association for Media Literacy Education, 2007).

Taking the time to fact-check and question a source is not often intuitive nor is it the fastest intake of information, given the rate at which media is distributed in the digital age. But as media has evolved, so too has our literacy education and skill set.

It is a personal responsibility to recognize and understand one's own bias. We find meaning in messages based on personal experience and identity. Similarly, it is a civic responsibility to recognize and decipher the bias behind the messages in order to become a more properly informed populace. Without these literacy skills, we render our democracy ineffective and highly susceptible to disinformation.

4.4 Unique Advantages to Combating Disinformation Available to Younger Journalists

While recent advances in technology have made the distribution and availability of disinformation more prevalent in our society, it can also be argued that these elements have made fighting disinformation easier. One particular group that can do this is young journalists. When leaders, such as politicians and business people, say statements that are false or misleading, particularly when referring back to a previous event, it is easier than ever for these journalists to check data on what they are referring to in order to confirm if what they are saying is true or false. Video, pictures, and audio are just a few of the media tools available to them that they can use to do this.

Not only are these tools available, but young journalists have a particular advantage in using them. These journalists have used technology, such as cell phones and computers, their entire lives, so there is not the same novelty aspect to it that applies to some veteran journalists that use it. Moreover, journalists at this age have seen technology grow at a pace that is faster than ever before, and one that will likely only continue to accelerate. These journalists are ready for the speed of this transformation in technology, and some will be (and have already been for that matter) at the forefront for developing the technology that will be used to fight disinformation.

Journalists know the tools that they need to best fight disinformation, so it is only fair to allow them to help shape them during the design practice as well. Anyone with knowledge of scientific elements can create technological advancements, but creativity and direction is needed to make these items special. Journalists have this.

Young journalists have also been raised in a world where it is more common than ever before to question everything. As technology has improved, the world has gone farther away from the old view of fatalism. Journalists have always been the individuals tasked with, and taking on, the burden of questioning what they see and verifying that it is correct. But now, this is more common for everyone in the world. With the internet, people from any walk of life can check to see if something that they heard is true or not. With cell phones, events are recorded and seen, leaving no room for conflicting accounts.

Journalists must take it a step further. Not only must they combat disinformation, which is important; they also must help explain to their audience why events are happening, or even

why the disinformation is taking place. As the world moves on, many might be able to verify the authenticity of events, but there will always be a need for explanation and analysis of the sights that are witnessed. Journalists have the advantage of being able to provide context, and a perspective of curiosity, that can benefit their audience when this analysis is needed. And young journalist are accustomed to living in a time where this is a possibility for them more than ever before.

4.5 Transparency is Key When Building Trust

While media literacy education is a key pillar in combating disinformation, another lesson that JED fellows learned is that transparency can certainly complement it. Who hasn't found themself speculating when lines of information are cut off? Rumors develop when there is a dearth of trustful information. This can also apply to "fake news." Those who are not well informed about journalistic processing will speculate in misleading ways. The use of anonymous sources may come to mind as an example. Journalists can help ameliorate the era of disinformation by making their reporting strategies transparent.

In order to desiccate the breeding ground for fake news, establishing reliable information is essential. Why? When journalists work in a transparent manner, readers will hopefully rely on information given to them by media outlets rather than on those given to them by people who create and spread fake news. In this process of trust-gaining transparency is key (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). In this sense transparency is a precondition for trust in the work of journalists. When the audience knows how journalists gather information and when they have knowledge about the different steps of news-processing and about journalistic standards, then they will not spread folderol like: *'The chancellor has called the editorial office in order to prohibit the publication of certain new articles.'* which is an example for a rumor that the author of this section was once confronted with and which can similarly be found on websites like "watergate.tv" or "nachdenkseiten.de". Someone who is well informed about the work of journalists would easily debunk this statement.

Transparency is a crucial component because it...

- helps to build **trust** in media outlets
- reduces cause for **speculation**
- fosters **empathy** for struggles that journalists face
- stimulates **critical thinking**
- helps readers to make an **educated guess**

The next logical step is: How to implement transparency in the journalistic process? There are various ways in doing so and the suggested list does not claim to be comprehensive. How the demand for transparency is realized exactly depends on the specific medium. However, it should be clear that transparency should happen on various levels. The following part describes these levels and also includes concrete suggestions for media outlets.

- The level of **information gathering**: Transparency on the level of information gathering means that the audience needs to be informed about how journalists use sources. When they learn about this and about their own role as a source, then they will have less

problems in identifying trustworthy sources. This can, for example, happen in workshops or in schools. One could also think about downloadable apps that lead readers through a day of journalists in interactive quizzes.

- The level of **information selection**: It is also important that readers learn how journalists select information that eventually finds its way into an article. This is especially important because people regularly blame media outlets to withhold information on purpose. Transparency on this level can be established by additional background boxes next to articles. It would also be possible to arrange an information booth in the city on the weekend where journalists directly talk to people. People should also learn why some information cannot be published!
- The level of **writing articles and processing news**: What journalists take for granted is not self-evident for readers. There are not only filter bubbles on social media, but also in real life: Journalists need to step out of their everyday working life and reflect upon it. Readers could therefore be invited to the editorial office once a month or editorial staff could launch a livestream to their office once a week
- The level of **publication**: Normally it's journalists asking questions. But they should also be transparent about the questions they ask themselves ('*Can I publish it like this?*')and they should be open to questions asked by the audience. Readers may be more empathic when they learn about the struggles that journalists face. Media outlets should therefore implement feedback channels and could possibly state a code of transparency on their website. Last but not least other media like books or films are helpful when they broach the issue of transparency in journalism.

5. GERMAN PERSPECTIVE ON AMERICAN MEDIA

When thinking about disinformation, one should consider that **media systems** vary between different states – and even regions. In Germany, for example, there is a relatively strong public broadcasting system ("öffentlich-rechtlicher Rundfunk") with more than 30 different TV and radio channels and at least a dozen online news outlets. In the United States, public broadcasting exists as well, but is not as widely used, or publicly funded. Consequently, different problems and approaches can be observed in the context of disinformation.

Germany: The dominance and importance of the public broadcasting system has led to a growing amount of criticism which has been articulated by the term "Lügenpresse" (lying press). At the same time, the German media system is relatively **diverse**. Especially newspapers represent a wide range of the political spectrum. Major challenge: Regain trust of media consumers.

United States: The media system in the United States is not as diverse as German media system. And especially, TV networks tend to disseminate stark political views. In a way, this represents a more general, sociological trend that can be observed in multiple western societies: **polarization**. Major challenge: Decrease societal polarization and catalyze a rational discourse.

6. SOLUTIONS

Disinformation is a complex phenomenon involving very different actors and interests. As a matter of fact, there cannot be a single strategy that is sufficient to eliminate the creation and distribution of manipulated information. The JED Fellowship has shown that fighting disinformation requires a multi-stakeholder approach, involving social media companies, news outlets and journalists, government actors – but also the media consumers themselves. In collaboration with Dr. Carrie Brown (2018), director of the social journalism program at the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism, fellowship participants developed a range of potential counter-strategies to disinformation.

To act against disinformation is not as complicated as it may sound. A reliable strategy contains elements every trained journalist should pay attention to while working in a news outlet. Unfortunately this isn't always the case, so it's stated here again: Proper and (time-) intensive research is essential for quality journalism. The increasing pressure on media broadcasters through blogs and social media leads in some cases to rash and wrong articles in order to be the first one to publish a story. In the worst case, this leads to false publications and a further erosion of trust in the established media. Every fact in a story must be checked, preferably twice. At the same time, to keep this fact-checking transparent for the readers, a companion document should be published for each journalistic piece, containing the sources and facts of a story.

In general, transparency is a point that cannot be overestimated in the fight against disinformation. Where do the sources of an article come from? What is the background of the experts or protagonists who are cited? And what intentions do they have? All these questions should be answered by the author in his publication. In addition, the media (at least the non-public service broadcasters) should clarify which political tendency they represent. No matter how neutral one may keep the reporting, the political character always shimmers through in one place, whether when it comes to the selection of topics, of the interview partners or the choice of words. So, the consumer should be able to understand why a particular focus has been chosen by the editor. Furthermore, the separation of opinion and information, which should anyway belong to the virtue of a journalist, contributes to transparency. It is important to keep this in mind when it comes to fight disinformation.

Rumours in social media should never form the basis for an article. Images can be adulterated, videos can be edited and posts can be distributed by bots. This makes social media vulnerable to disinformation. Especially in large or confusing events (like the riots in Charlottesville 2017), media houses should have their own reporters present instead of relying on tweets. Therefore, media should get their own network of reporters and sources in as many places as possible, as the Associated Press succeeds in doing. Reporters are familiar with the local situation and local politics, which makes way trust between the media and its local audience.

Especially in social media, news is spreading rapidly, as well as disinformation. To at least keep their own comment columns on Facebook or Twitter free of disinformation, news outlets must actively counteract. This requires trained social media managers who not only link to the broadcaster's own content, but are able to refute obvious false claims. They do not have to engage in time-consuming discussions, but should intervene in a targeted manner when they recognize disinformation. At the same time, social media managers can reward good and

ongoing comments so that they are displayed in a more prominent position. Last but not least, this also benefits the discussion culture in the social media. Therefore, the job of social media manager should be granted to trained personnel specializing in this area, and not just given to an intern as an afterthought, as Professor Brown said (2018).

Trust matters. Journalism is useless without a trusting audience. According to a recent study by the Knight Foundation and Gallup, however, the majority of adults in the U.S. have lost trust in news outlets. At the same time, 69 percent of them agree that trust can be restored (Gallup/Knight Foundation, 2018). The question is: how? In the course of the JED Fellowship, different measures were discussed. First, audience participation should be a key goal. Events like town hall meetings give journalists the opportunity to create an understanding of journalistic processes and to engage in personal dialogue with (critical) news consumers. Additionally, the audience should be involved in research and topic selection. Ideally, readers, listeners, and viewers regard their preferred media outlet as a contact point where their concerns are taken seriously and that is worth sharing information with. Secondly, and even more importantly, media companies need to develop creative means in order to reach audiences that they have either lost or never had in the past to expand their reach as a credible information source – for instance, by improving the searchability of (high-quality) journalistic content via Google.

In the long run, however, the overall objective must be to increase the audience's resilience against disinformation. Readers and viewers must be equipped with some essential fact-checking skills and have to develop and internalize a critical, healthy general attitude towards the information that they are confronted with, especially online. Media literacy education might be the most promising approach for effectively and sustainably combating disinformation. During discussions with Michelle Ciulla Lipkin (2018), Executive Director of the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE), two main objectives of media literacy education have been identified: First, developing critical thinking is essential. Effective media education should go beyond current technologies and focus on teaching overarching skills that remain relevant over time. Secondly, the general audience has to develop a rough understanding of financial structures and potential biases in the media landscape. Combating disinformation will only be effective if there is a broad public that is sensitized to the potential manipulation of information. The publication Mother Jones has aggregated some practical advice from experts on how users can detect and fight disinformation, including instructing the reader to discern whether the information incites strong emotion and to check its veracity on sites like Snopes.com and Politifact (Vongkiatkajorn, 2018).

CONCLUSION

The analysis of academic and primary, journalistic examples, as well as the first-hand analysis of JED fellows, encapsulates the so-called "fake news" era that we face today. Dispelling disinformation is incumbent upon both the creators and consumers of media but is particularly challenging because of the current political climate and because of a technological environment that allows the spread of false information in mere seconds. As illustrated by the Poynter, Knight Foundation and Gallup surveys, trust in the news media is flagging for a large swath of the American population. Furthermore, MIT researchers have revealed that false information spreads at a faster rate online than does accurate news.

As discussed in the literature review, the term "fake news" cannot be neatly placed into a nutshell. False information may be fabricated intentionally and take the form of propaganda, or, as some scholars argue, the form of parody, satire, or even advertising. A crucial obstacle that must be recognized is a lack of media literacy education. If news media consumers learned to apply critical thinking from the outset, the spread of "fake news" could be averted in cases where it is spread unknowingly rather than intentionally. Key to understanding why a well-meaning news media consumer would unknowingly spread disinformation is learning how the human brain is wired. A KQED video cited above illustrates how the human brain is susceptible to manipulation, especially when presented with information that incites strong emotion and, thus, confirmation bias.

While "fake news" will certainly never cease — and is certainly not a new phenomenon, as discussed by Professor Gueli — solutions should be sought. As in the case of the Associated Press, journalists can be stationed at various locales so that original reporting can be produced. This proved crucial in the case of Charlottesville. Robust organizations like The New York Times can combat disinformation by getting ahead of "fake news" via Google search and metadata. However, less robust newsrooms and freelance journalists can combat disinformation by using free online tools, like reverse image search, and relying on fact checkers, like Politifact.org. Additionally, newsrooms can take the concrete step of employing social media specialists to the online engagement position. In other words, the new intern should not be the choice for who decides *how* the engagement is carried out. This engagement may range from sourcing stories on social media to discerning valuable online comments versus ones that perpetuate "fake news." Lastly, transparency of journalists' reporting strategies is key to restoring trust with news consumers, and as revealed by MIT researchers, there is a hunger for it.

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