

Fake News or Real News: What's the Difference and How to Know OLLI Summer 2017

* **Please Note:** An interactive version of this syllabus can be found at <http://bev.berkeley.edu>

"Fake News" is not a fight over Truth but rather a fight over Power"

2016 was the "Year of the Hoax" disguised as truth. Fake news and the proliferation of opinion that passes for news is creating confusion, punching holes in what is true, and leading us to doubt everything branded as "news." A BuzzFeed analysis found that false election stories from hoax sites and hyperpartisan blogs generated more engagement than content from real news sites during the last three months of the election. In the aftermath of the election, Donald Trump weaponized the term "fake news" and used it to describe the traditional media. The United States has become polarized between Liberal and Conservative factions, each one claiming that the other produces false information to further its own political agenda. In this course we will examine the difference between "fake news", satire, opinion, slanted journalism, propaganda and factual news reporting. We will look at the rise of the fake news phenomenon, how and why it has gone viral, who writes it, why people believe it, and its actual and potential consequences. We will debate the issue of fake news and free speech: Should the spread of false information be regulated and if so, who should regulate it?

Week 1 June 6, Introduction and Overview of the Course

- What is "Fake News?" What is Legitimate News?
- Why Fake News has emerged as an issue now: The emergence and evolution of "fake news"
- How can we tell Fake News when we see it? What does "real news" Look Like?
- Who writes Fake News and Why?
- Why people tend to believe fake News: The psychology behind its spread
- What are the actual and potential consequences of the spread of Fake News?
- Fake News and Free Speech
- What Can be done?
 - <https://www.facebook.com/vicenews/videos/vb.235852889908002/722496247910328/?type=2&theater>
 - <http://americannews.com/lady-gaga-makes-disgusting-move-undermine-trumps-inauguration-will-pay-big/>
 - <http://usapolitics24hrs.com/index.php/2016/12/23/confirmed-justice-ruth-bader-ginsburg-resigning-post-associate-justice-supreme-court/>
 - ress.org/under-political-pressure-kuwait-cancels-major-event-at-four-seasons-switches-to-trumps-d-c-1f204315d513#.b0cz6go5p
 - <https://www.facebook.com/SourceFedNews/videos/1199514293432055/>

http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2016/12/stop_calling_everything_fake_news.html

- **Problems of unreliability in traditional media:** inaccurate/insufficient information such as errors and omissions, biased information (often in favor of the status quo), government pressure to suppress reports, corporate public relations campaigns

- <https://theintercept.com/2016/12/10/anonymous-leaks-to-the-washpost-about-the-cias-russia-beliefs-are-no-substitute-for-evidence/>
 - The public editor in the NYT: checking false information and editorial spin in news articles (Bernie Sanders article)
- **What is Fake news? Is objective News an illusion?**

After reading the following article, think about how the "Iran Deal" was reported:

<http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/media/308940-wheres-the-outrage-over-obamas-fake-news-peddling>

Also note how easy it is to create a realistic fake news story: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/18/us/fake-news-hillary-clinton-cameron-harris.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&clickSource=story-heading&module=b-lede-package-region®ion=top-news&WT.nav=top-news&_r=0

- How does fake news differ from problems of unreliability noted above? Hoaxes, Satire, opinion, and Comedy, “spin,” intentional disinformation mixing factual material with fraudulent information
- Jon Stewart on the thin line between traditional media and fake news <https://qz.com/850475/jon-stewart-the-american-media-has-become-an-information-laundering-scheme/>
- **one type of fake news — the version that mimics real news with the intent to deceive, which spreads rapidly online — is a new strain** <http://www.alternet.org/media/how-fake-news-exploded-and-how-tell-when-label-misused>

http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2016/12/stop_calling_everything_fake_news.html

- **How can we tell fake news when we see it?**
 - <http://guides.lib.berkeley.edu/evaluating-resources>
 - <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-media-trump-commentary-idUSKBN14O17D>
 - <http://www.factcheck.org/2016/11/how-to-spot-fake-news/>
 - And an argument about why fact checking won't help <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/fact-checking-wont-save-us-from-fake-news/>
 - [Daily Cal Presentation: What Real News Looks Like!](#)

Week 2 June 13 The emergence and evolution of Fake News

Before fake news, what was “real” news? The crumbling infrastructure of traditional journalism and the emergence of digital media

Read:

[Goodby to the Age of Newspapers, Hello to the Age of Corruption](#)

[Commentary: Fake News Isn't a New Problem, and We're Better Equipped to Fight It Now](#)

[The Corpse Factory and the Birth of Fake News](#)

[Lessons of the Fake News Pandemic of 1942](#)

- **Why the explosion now? How and why Fake News goes viral**
- [Inside Facebook's \(Totally Insane, Unintentionally Gigantic, Hyperpartisan\) PoliticalMedia Machine](#) (NYT August 2016)
- [How Fake News Goes Viral: A Case Study](#) (NYT)
- [This is how hyperpartisan Political News Gets Made](#) (Buzzfeed)
- [Vampire Web Sites Suck Content from Legitimate Progressive News Sites](#)
 - The new financial environment and the temptations facing "legitimate" media

Guest Speaker Eric Maas

Week 3: June 20 Who Writes Fake News, Why, Why do People believe it, and What are the Consequences?

- **Individuals write for profit and Fun** (hoaxes as clickbait and trolls)
- ["Fake News Writer Says He is Proud of his Work"](#)
- [Inside a Fake News Sausage factory](#)
- **Governments and corporations promote disinformation to manipulate the public**

Craig Silverman, ["A Hollywood Film Is Using Fake News To Get Publicity"](#) Buzzfeed, Feb. 13, 2017 (**Rachel**)

- **Trolls and Ideological activists propagate false narratives to take down opponents and exercise power**
 - [Know your meme: Birther Movement \(Crystal\)](#)
 - Amanda Hess ["How the Trolls Stole Washington,"](#) NYT Magazine Feb. 28, 2017
 - Andrew Marantz, ["Trolls for Trump: Meet Mike Cernovich, the meme mastermind of the alt-right,"](#) *The New Yorker*, October 31, 2016
 - "Despite their self-presentation as ciphers, trolls have always had a point of view, and #GamerGate offered a platform for a whole coalition to express its distrust of media, resentment toward women and anger at progressive critiques of racism and misogyny. They had demands, too: They worked to get journalists fired, to pressure advertisers, to silence feminist critics."

So how does all of this relate to Trump?

- **Outright propaganda from the Bully Pulpit** "The point of modern propaganda isn't only to misinform or push an agenda. It is to exhaust your critical thinking, to annihilate truth."--Gary Kasparov
- [Ten Times Trump Spread Fake News](#) (Professor Crawford)
- Charles J. Sykes, ["When Nobody Cares the President is Lying"](#) NYT Sunday Review February 4, 2017 (**Mahira**)
- Carole Cadwalladr, ["Robert Mercer: the big data billionaire waging war on mainstream media: With links to Donald Trump, Steve Bannon and Nigel Farage, the](#)

[rightwing US computer scientist is at the heart of a multimillion-dollar propaganda network](#)" *The Guardian*, February 26, 2017 (Crystal and Nicole)

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recommended: A long article on Russia https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/07/magazine/the-agency.html?_r=0P

Why do people believe Fake news? "Fake News is not a fight over Truth but rather a fight over Power"

- **People want to be entertained and politics is about perception:** [Bret Stephens, "Don't Dismiss President Trump's Attacks on the Media as Mere Stupidity"](#) Time Feb. 26, 2017
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- **People are no longer interested in facts:** Roger Cohen, ["Am I Imagining This?,"](#) New York Times, Feb 10 2017 And an argument about why fact checking won't help <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/fact-checking-wont-save-us-from-fake-news/>
- **Conformation bias** <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/25/opinion/campaign-stops/your-facts-or-mine.html?smprod=nytcore-iphone&smid=nytcore-iphone-shar>
- **Demonstrating shared values with your community** <http://www.cnn.com/2016/11/20/opinions/fake-news-stories-thrive-donath/index.html>
- **Can People be Brainwashed into Believing Fake News? Guest Speaker?: Dr. Hilary Godstine.** Dr. Goldstine is a psychologist at Berkeley Therapy Institute and worked intensively with Dr. Margaret T. Singer, a world expert on the effects of propaganda and how thinking and belief systems are manipulated.
- **What are the Consequences?**
 - **"The actual impact of fake news is dependent on who delivers it"** [Ben Thompson, "Fake News"](#) (Mahira)
 - **No matter whether true or false, allegations can shape perceptions into the future** <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-trump-russia-commentary-idUSKBN14V2MQ> (Susana)
 - **False allegations can have dangerous consequences** <http://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-comet-conspiracy-theory-20161205-story.html> (Crystal)
 - <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/24/world/asia/pakistan-israel-khawaja-asif-fake-news-nuclear.html> (Mounica)
 - **Fake News and the 2016 Election** <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/online-hoaxes-fake-news-played-role-election/> (Hannah)
 - <https://www.facebook.com/TomiLahren/videos/vb.868219436604578/1166533586773160/?type=2&theater> (Prof. Crawford)

Week 4 June 27 What can be done?

- Public/Private Regulation of Fake news and Free Speech