

spectra

The Magazine of the National Communication Association

November 2017 | Volume 53, Number 4



ABOUT spectra

Spectra, the magazine of the National Communication Association (NCA), features articles on topics that are relevant to Communication scholars, teachers, and practitioners. *Spectra* is one means through which NCA works toward accomplishing its mission of advancing Communication as the discipline that studies all forms, modes, media, and consequences of communication through humanistic, social scientific, and aesthetic inquiry.

NCA serves its members by enabling and supporting their professional interests. Dedicated to fostering and promoting free and ethical communication, NCA promotes the widespread appreciation of the importance of communication in public and private life, the application of competent communication to improve the quality of human life and relationships, and the use of knowledge about communication to solve human problems.

The views and opinions expressed in *Spectra* articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Communication Association.

All NCA members receive a *Spectra* subscription. The magazine also is available via individual print subscription for non-members at the annual cost of \$50; to subscribe, send an email to memberservice@natcom.org.

Spectra (ISSN 2157-3751) is published four times a year (March, May, September, and November). © National Communication Association. All rights reserved.

ADVERTISING IN SPECTRA

For information about placing an advertisement in *Spectra*, please visit www.natcom.org/advertising.

ADVERTISING IN CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Deadline for March Issue: January 15

Deadline for May Issue: March 15

Submit text-only ads online at www.natcom.org/postjob/.

Payment information must accompany ad order.

Visit www.natcom.org/spectragraphicads/ for information on submitting graphic ads. NCA accepts Visa, Mastercard, Discover, American Express, and purchase orders.

Questions? Contact spectra@natcom.org.

NCA supports continued efforts to eliminate discriminatory hiring practices. All employers are asked to identify the inclusion of sexual orientation in their affirmative action statements. Advertisers must provide information about the availability of spousal and domestic partner benefits, which will appear with all online and print advertisements. NCA is not responsible for verifying the accuracy of advertisements.

2017 NCA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President

Stephen J. Hartnett, University of Colorado, Denver

First Vice President

Ronald L. Jackson II, University of Cincinnati

Second Vice President

Star Muir, George Mason University

Immediate Past President

Christina S. Beck, Ohio University

Educational Policies Board Director

Scott A. Myers, West Virginia University

Publications Board Director

Bonnie J. Dow, Vanderbilt University

Research Board Director

Mindy Fenske, University of South Carolina

Finance Board Director

Orlando Taylor, Fielding Graduate University

Finance Board Member

Ronald Shields, Sam Houston State University

Finance Board Member

Marnel Niles Goins, California State University, Fresno

Interim Executive Director

Trevor Parry-Giles

SPECTRA STAFF

Director of External Affairs and Publications

Wendy Fernando

wfernando@natcom.org

Contributors

LaKeshia Anderson

Jenna Sauber

Design

Krystyn MacGregor

Advertising and Permissions

Aaron Tuttle

Cover Art

Bigstock.com/gorbachlena

In this issue



7

AN INTRODUCTION
FAKE NEWS



14

**IF IT'S FAKE,
IT'S NOT NEWS**

By Rochelle Riley



24

WHEN WORDS LOSE THEIR MEANING:
**COUNTERFACTUAL ADVOCACY,
DONALD TRUMP, AND THE RISE
OF DESPOTIC POPULISM**

By Steven R. Goldzwig, Ph.D.



8

**WHAT DO WE MEAN
BY FAKE? WHAT DO
WE MEAN BY NEWS?**

By Katherine G. Fry, Ph.D.



18

**ON THE DANGERS OF FAKE
NEWS AND FAKE SKEPTICISM**

By Steven Alan Carr, Ph.D.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

2

Fake News, Startling Truths,
and the Power of Trust in
an Age of Disbelief
By Stephen J. Hartnett, Ph.D.

SPOTLIGHT

4

Data About the Discipline:
Journal Citation Metrics
for NCA Journals

Public Presence:
NCA Hosts Public Program
on Communication, Culture,
and Health

In Our Journals

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

28

spectra ? DID YOU KNOW

A quick search of NCA's 11
scholarly journals for the term
"Fake News" returns more than
200 results. Read these articles
and more online by visiting
www.natcom.org/nca-journals.

Fake News, Startling Truths, and the Power of Trust in an Age of Disbelief

By Stephen J. Hartnett, Ph.D.

And so it came to pass that a great nation, with a long and venerable tradition of terrific journalism, lost its mind over “fake news.” The phrase rocketed to national prominence courtesy of President Donald Trump’s Twitter account, on which the President routinely lambasted those institutions which dared to criticize him. “Fake news,” then, as used by President Trump, was a defensive phrase meant to deflect attention from a troubled administration by attacking the East Coast liberals who ran the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and other highly respected news outlets.

More than just political deflection, however, the Trumpian notion of “fake news” carried significant implications for our norms of communication. Committed to extending the notion of deconstruction to its logical conclusion, the President blew past any notion of relativism, the social construction of reality, or healthy skepticism, and on into the land of conspiracy and myth, thus hurtling headlong into the bitter morass of nihilism, where facts are irrelevant and counter-perspectives are treason, where whim governs messaging and ego directs the state.

And so, pounded home by tweet after tweet, President Trump’s shouting “fake news” against his critics soon became synonymous with denying anything like complex historical reasoning, eschewing arguments from multiple vantage points, and foregoing considerations that extend beyond the immediate news cycle. Nicholas Kristof captured the high stakes involved in President Trump’s “fake news” barrage when he lamented (*New York Times*, August 24, 2017), “If only President Trump denounced neo-Nazis as passionately and sincerely as he castigates journalists.”

The moment was thus ripe with contradiction, as the President hurled “fake news” charges at his critics, while flooding our communication networks with evasions, slander, and misinformation. Consider the example of President Trump’s bluster toward North Korea. Intelligence agencies suggested in April 2017 that the hermit kingdom was about to launch another ballistic missile, or perhaps was preparing to detonate another test nuclear explosion. In an attempt to deter the North Koreans, the Trump White House began a campaign of threat-escalation, claiming that a massive, nuclear-armed “armada” of U.S. vessels was sailing toward the Korean peninsula, the better to incinerate anyone foolish enough to cross the President. As Aaron Blake chronicled in the *Washington Post* (April 18, 2017), talk of this “armada” was floated by Admiral Harry Harris on April 9, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis on April 11, White House Spokesperson Sean Spicer on April 11, and then Trump himself, an anonymous “senior administration official,” and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on April 12, thus indicating an orchestrated campaign. The Trump White House was on message.

But then Mark Landler and Eric Schmitt reported in the *New York Times* (April 19, 2017) that the Vinson strike group (including the aircraft carrier *USS Carl Vinson* and its associated ships) was at “that very moment sailing in the opposite direction, to take part in joint exercises with the Australian Navy in the Indian Ocean, 3,500 miles southwest of the Korean Peninsula.” Reasonable people asked, “How on earth do you lose track of the world’s most powerful warships?” To which the answer was obvious: the Trump White House was



To Communication scholars who are committed to seeking truth... while deploying communication that is based in evidence, the Trump-directed flood of “fake news” thus stands as a dire threat to our very way of life.

lying about their location. U.S. foreign policy, the very balancing of life and death in such crisis situations, was itself now another Trumpian mash-up of “fake news.”

The problem, of course, is that when the White House issued such deceptive statements on a daily basis, it lost all credibility, making the world a more dangerous place. As Max Boot wrote in *Foreign Policy* (February 21, 2017), the proliferation of Trump-driven “fake news” meant “the wheels are falling off” U.S. foreign policy, for neither allies nor foes believed a word uttered by the President. Simon Denyer, writing from Beijing, observed in the *Washington Post* (February 28, 2017) that the leaders of China’s Communist Party were so baffled by President Trump’s proliferating “fake news” that they weren’t sure “whether to laugh or cry” at the implosion of America’s credibility on the world stage.

I was in Beijing in June, when I had the opportunity to lead a workshop on U.S.-style civic engagement and free speech for the International Department of the Communist Party, and almost every question I received from my smart, wired, and enthusiastic audience began with, “Well yes, but what about Trump? Don’t his lies undermine everything you are saying?” I was in China, advocating for free speech; the President was in Washington, proffering “fake news.” In the eyes of my Chinese friends, the fact that Trump could get away with his parade of “fake news” showed that free speech is dangerous and not to be trusted. While I countered with charts about checks and balances and stories of noble journalists speaking truth to power and citizens marching for the common good, Trump’s tweets continued, thus confirming my Chinese friends’ worst fears about the instability of democracy.

And therein lies the rub: modernity, as we know it, rests upon trust. You send a ship to Hong Kong, with goods made in Detroit, to be paid for by banks in Shenzhen, so that consumers all around the Pearl River Delta can use products that actually work and laborers all around Michigan can put food on their tables. If the products fail, or the checks bounce, then participants in the vast network of trade lose trust and close down the avenues of exchange, leading to market failure, job loss, and the unraveling of lives. No trust, no jobs. No trust, no goods. No trust, no international culture of ideas and art and friendship.

To Communication scholars who are committed to seeking truth—even in its most relativist, constructed, debated, and deconstructed forms—while deploying communication that is based in evidence, the Trump-directed flood of “fake news” thus stands as a dire threat to our very way of life. Indeed, as long as the White House functions as a factory of misdirection and nihilism, then our culture of communication and trust—whether environmental communication or organizational communication, health communication or cultural criticism, communication about gender and sexuality, or international communication—is in jeopardy.

And so, in this issue of *Spectra*, we are proud to publish a series of essays on “fake news” with the hope of renewing your faith in the possibility of informed debate that is rooted in trust. As these pieces demonstrate, NCA remains committed to supporting a culture of communication and trust, with that trust rooted in an ethic of listening carefully, balancing competing claims, and moving gently toward the common good. ■

Spotlight

DATA ABOUT THE DISCIPLINE

Journal Citation Metrics for NCA Journals

Journal citation metrics provide insight into the impact and reach of a journal. Often, these metrics are required for annual reports and tenure and promotion dossiers. These metrics also help scholars select a journal when submitting an article for publication. Rather than relying on the single impact factor metric, NCA provides multiple journal citation metrics for NCA's 11 journals. Specifically, NCA provides four metrics: Journal Impact Factor (JIF), CiteScore (CS), Source-Normalized Impact per Paper (SNIP), and SCImago Journal Rank (SJR). These metrics are defined in the following ways:

- **JIF (InCites Journal Citation Reports):** The number of citations made in the current year to articles in the previous two years (in selected journals), divided by the total number of citable articles from the previous two years.
- **CS (Elsevier/Scopus):** The number of citations made in the current year to articles in the previous three years of the journal, divided by the total number of articles in the previous three years of the journal.
- **SNIP (Scopus):** SNIP weights citations based on the number of citations in a field. If there are fewer total citations in a research field, then citations are worth more in that field.
- **SJR (Scopus):** This metric does not consider all citations of equal weight; the prestige of the citing journal is taken into account.

The following NCA journal metrics are from 2016 or 2017 ratings and rankings.

	<p>Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ JIF: 0.767 (#57/79 in Communication) ■ CS: N/A ■ SNIP: N/A ■ SJR: 0.828 (#46/293 in Communication) 		<p>Journal of Applied Communication Research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ JIF: 0.308 (#75/79 in Communication) ■ CS: 1.24 (#70/582 in Language & Linguistics) ■ SNIP: 0.840 ■ SJR: 0.493 (#81/293 in Communication)
	<p>Communication Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ JIF: N/A ■ CS: 1.79 (#33/582 in Language & Linguistics) ■ SNIP: 1.746 ■ SJR: 0.817 (#49/293 in Communication) 		<p>Journal of International and Intercultural Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ JIF: N/A ■ CS: 1.14 (#33/697 in Cultural Studies) ■ SNIP: 1.239 ■ SJR: 0.630 (#61/293 in Communication)
	<p>Communication Monographs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ JIF: 1.738 (#19/79 in Communication) ■ CS: 1.85 (#30/582 in Language & Linguistics) ■ SNIP: 1.638 ■ SJR: 1.039 (#29/293 in Communication) 		<p>Quarterly Journal of Speech</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ JIF: 0.460 (#67/79 in Communication) ■ CS: 1.15 (#77/582 in Language & Linguistics) ■ SNIP: 1.551 ■ SJR: 0.822 (#48/293 in Communication)
	<p>Communication Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ JIF: N/A ■ CS: N/A ■ SNIP: N/A ■ SJR: 0.288 (#134/293 in Communication) 		<p>Review of Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ JIF: N/A ■ CS: 0.21 (#195/263 in Communication) ■ SNIP: 0.113 ■ SJR: 0.139 (#217/293 in Communication)
	<p>Critical Studies in Media Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ JIF: 0.881 (#53/79 in Communication) ■ CS: 0.94 (#79/263 in Communication) ■ SNIP: 1.134 ■ SJR: 0.460 (#88/293 in Communication) 		<p>Text and Performance Quarterly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ JIF: N/A ■ CS: 0.34 (#44/619 in Literature & Literary Theory) ■ SNIP: 0.518 ■ SJR: 0.253 (#148/293 in Communication)
	<p>First Amendment Studies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ JIF: N/A ■ CS: 0.00 (#255/263 in Communication) ■ SNIP: N/A ■ SJR: 0.106 (#259/293 in Communication) 		

PUBLIC PRESENCE

NCA Hosts Public Program on Communication, Culture, and Health



On Thursday, September 14, 2017, NCA hosted "Communication, Culture, and Health," a public program held on the campus of the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. The program addressed the roles of culture and communication in advancing health equity, improving health quality, and eliminating the health disparities that impact the minority-majority state of New Mexico and its unique population. This program was co-sponsored by the University of New Mexico's Department of Communication and Journalism and the Communication and Journalism Graduate and Professional Organization.

Panelists included **Lorenda Belone** (Community Health Program, College of Education, University of New Mexico); **Teresa Clay** (Director, Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Program, Indian Health Service—Albuquerque); **Tamar Ginossar** (Department of Communication & Journalism, University of New Mexico); medical student **Jaron Kee**; **Johnnye Lewis** (College of Pharmacy, University of New Mexico); and **Nathania Tsosie** (Associate Director, Center for Native American Health, University of New Mexico).

IN OUR JOURNALS

Brian Cozen, "Facting Fiction: Revolution, the United Nations, and Cultural Politics of Electricity," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 34 (2017): 329-343.

Cozen's piece focuses on the season-long collaborative campaign involving the United Nations and NBC's primetime drama *Revolution*, a show about global loss of electricity. Cozen argues that the collaboration between NBC and the UN extended beyond merely utilizing a television show to promote energy access. Rather, he posits that the show's paratexts offered a lens through which to interpret fiction as authentic, and suggests that the collaboration itself invited audiences to not only reflect on their dependence on certain energy regimes, but also legitimize the maintenance and expansion of those regimes globally. As Cozen explains, UN involvement in the show authenticates *Revolution's* fiction as similar to contemporary politics, while the show's celebrity platform creates interest in advocacy and sustains the campaign as an advocacy tool as well.

Holly Kathleen Hall, "The New Voice of America: Countering Foreign Propaganda and Disinformation Act," *First Amendment Studies* (2017). doi: 10.1080/21689725.2017.1349618

In this article, Hall argues that there is a need for a governmental organization tasked with creating counter-propaganda, and also explains the deficiencies and vulnerabilities of the Countering Foreign Propaganda and Disinformation Act (CFPDA), signed

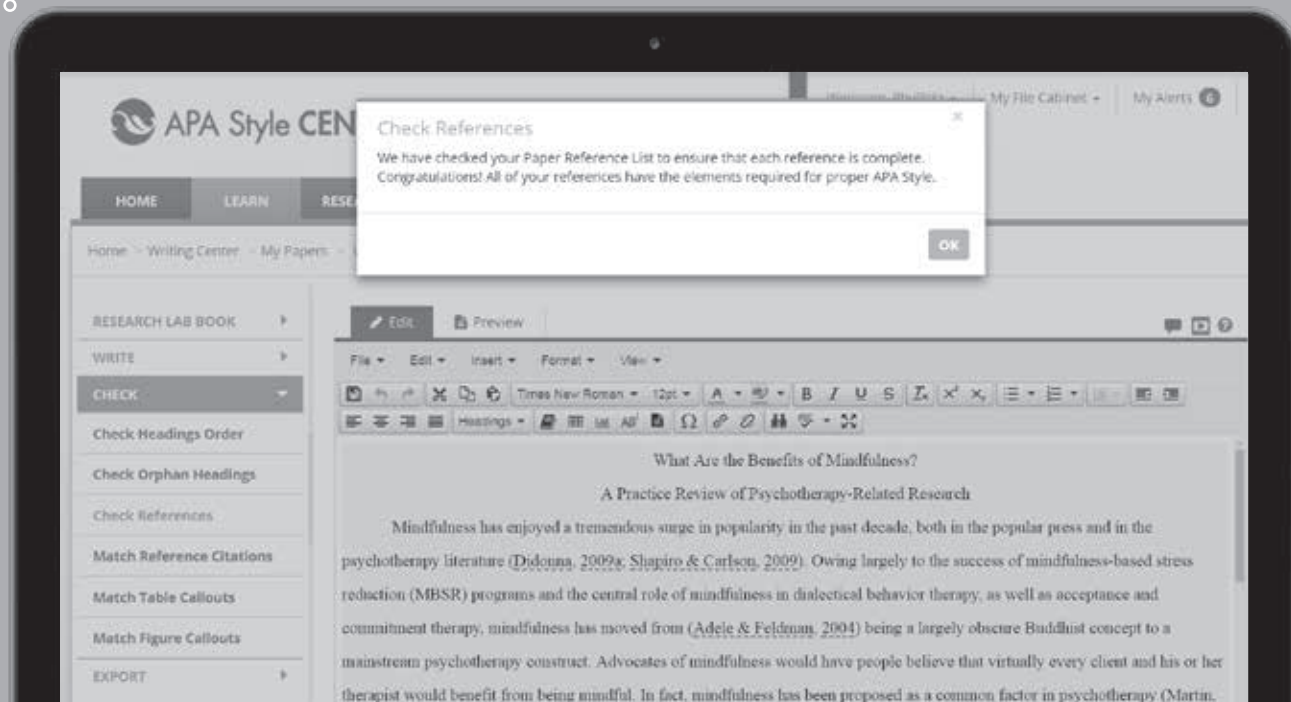
into law in 2016 by former President Barack Obama. The CFPDA largely focuses on countering foreign propaganda from countries such as China and Russia. However, as Hall explains, the Trump administration's relationship with Russia generates uncertainty about the commitment to fighting Russian disinformation and propaganda. Hall examines the ways in which other nations have dealt with Russian propaganda and offers a proposed structure for U.S. counter-propaganda.

Michael Buozis, "Giving Voice to the Accused: Serial and the Critical Potential of True Crime," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 14 (2017): 254-270.

In this essay, Buozis explores "criminal biography" as a genre of true crime that offers a means for interrogating modes of truth production and representation. He examines the use of voice in *Serial*, a popular podcast that told the story of Adnan Syed, who was convicted in 2000 for the murder of his ex-girlfriend. Specifically, Buozis focuses on producer and narrator Sarah Koenig's use of Syed's voice in the podcast, which was used to present Syed's take on the evidence and his experiences before and after his sentencing. Buozis explains that the practice of giving voice to the accused is a strategy for challenging truth claims in journalism and other nonfiction narratives, and posits that when journalists question institutional truth in this way, they can help reveal inequities in the American criminal justice system and affect criminal justice outcomes.

Think Big and Get the Details Right

With APA Style CENTRAL®.



Authoritative guidance for big thinkers writing in APA Style®

When it comes to writing in APA Style, the details matter. That's why we created APA Style CENTRAL, a cloud-based writing solution that makes learning APA Style, formatting papers, and citing sources easier than ever. It helps students with mastering the application of APA Style, giving them the freedom to think big while conducting research and writing papers.



LEARN RESEARCH WRITE PUBLISH

Learn more at www.apastyle.org/NCA

AN INTRODUCTION



FAKE NEWS

As this issue of *Spectra* went to press, the *Washington Post* website featured more than 7,600 articles that included the term “fake news.” Popularized by President Trump when he was still a candidate, the term has become ubiquitous. Charges of fake news have been levied against Facebook, against mainstream media outlets such as *The New York Times*, *CNN*, and *The Washington Post*, and against entire nations. Ultimately, “fake news” has become symbolic of the state of journalism and communication in an age when hackers and bots can manipulate what we see, a large portion of our citizens feel disconnected and left behind, an ever-larger portion are gathering their “news” from myriad unmoderated sources, and politics and personal beliefs have become inexorably intertwined.

For this issue of *Spectra*, Communication scholars and an award-winning journalist explore how we define fake news, how it defines us, and how we might play a leading role in rebuilding trust in our newsrooms and our classrooms, and in one another.

Katherine Fry opens the issue by asking, “What we do mean by fake? What do we mean by news?” She quickly acknowledges, however, that these aren’t the right questions – we must dig deeper into how people form their belief systems and what compels them to change their minds. Moreover, she argues that in the digital age, “News is not just a set of messages, a message system, or a commodity; it is a *process of participation and of relationships*.” Understanding the ways that news is created, delivered, consumed, and engaged with can help Communication and media scholars create more comprehensive media literacy education, and also can inspire everyone to think about the news more critically.

If it’s fake, is it news? Columnist and radio talk show host Rochelle Riley begins her essay with an adamant “no.” She urges journalists to take a page from writer and

suffragist Ida B. Wells, and “treat the campaign to make us irrelevant as what it is: an attack on democracy.” Riley references lessons from Wells, Rosa Parks, the late Gwen Ifill, and her own mentor and professor, Harry Amana, declaring, “If we remember our job—and do the job—it will be easier for us to continue to train new generations to continue to tell the story.”

Steven Carr continues the history lesson as he explores the dangers of “fake skepticism,” a hallmark of extremist political discourse harkening back to pre-Holocaust America. “What seems new, at least this time, is how these postures now get amplified through a labyrinth of communication piping and platforms that promote insulation and customization without the messiness of face-to-face human interaction.” He argues that Communication educators have a role to play in teaching students how to review and analyze evidence, to test ideas and come up with better ones. “Doing nothing frequently serves the interests of a status quo, especially when that status quo has a vested interest in making sure that the public stays put,” he writes.

We close with an essay from Steven Goldzwig that explains President Trump’s use of what Goldzwig labels “counterfactual advocacy,” which is contributing to the “ongoing deleterious effects of a present brand of public discourse – a discourse that threatens the realization of a more perfect union.” Goldzwig connects the assault on truth with the President’s populist and extremist rhetoric, which he argues has become a “new normal” that will have devastating consequences.

So, what can we do about fake news? The Fourth Estate has taken a severe hit, but we understand the power of the press more than ever, and Communication scholars and journalists must work together to reclaim, as NCA President Stephen J. Hartnett writes in his column, “the possibility of informed debate that is rooted in trust.”

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Spectra*. ■

What Do We Mean by Fake? What Do We Mean by News?

By Katherine G. Fry, Ph.D.

During a casual conversation with colleagues not long ago, the talk almost immediately turned to the current state of U.S. politics, specifically news and information we'd recently read, watched, and shared on social media. We discussed our concerns about possibly fabricated stories, distortions, and general spin, both coming out of the White House and generally present on the web. From the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign until now, it seems many casual conversations eventually wind up in that territory. Because I study news and teach media literacy, and have been speaking professionally to scholarly and community groups about news and the digital environment since the election, I have been witnessing from different sectors the fear about the state of information circulation and, especially, the escalating concerns about "fake news."

Typically, my academic stance in these talks is to be partially detached and analytical, attempting to put things into a larger, perhaps more comforting, historical

perspective. Recently, however, that's become more difficult, because it's not enough. The sheer onslaught of cyber-circulating information about major decisions, accusations, and alliances, not to mention reports of alleged fake news mills supported by U.S. and foreign interests, has been mind-boggling. There are many questions and concerns. Have foreign powers really tampered with the U.S. presidential election? Are major initiatives and long-standing federal foundations actually being de-funded or dismantled? Does anyone *really* know what's going on? Will we ever know the "truth?"

While we rely on journalism—aka news—to inform us, it has always been a healthy practice to critically assess legacy newspaper, television, and radio journalism in an effort to determine when and how it is constructed and whether it is reliable. However, in the digital environment, it is much more difficult to assess news and information. Especially on social media, it's a challenge to think intelligently about why certain kinds of information appear as they do,



Perhaps the quest to distinguish fake from real, truth from lies, misses the point. It's not deep enough. It doesn't ask the right questions. It's too focused.

where they originate, which sources are reliable, and which sources should be ignored. The result is often an unbearable cynicism, even for those who study news. What's real, what's fake, and how are we to examine or talk about it?

Perhaps the quest to distinguish fake from real, truth from lies, misses the point. It's not deep enough. It doesn't ask the right questions. It's too focused. Before, during, and after the recent U.S. presidential election, journalists, scholars, and concerned persons of all stripes were and are obsessing about concepts such as facts, truths, and lies. They muse about how this or that news figure gets away

with constructing or repeating distortions or outright lies. Why do people believe it? Who are these people who believe this stuff, even in the face of facts that prove otherwise? Obsessing about facts, while legitimate, is not enough. It neglects some other crucial points. One point is that, as psychological research has shown, people with strong beliefs tend to double down on those beliefs in the face of contradicting facts. Another is that fake news is not a new phenomenon. There have been instances of fraudulent reporting throughout the history of news. Consider *The New York Sun's* publication of the Great

[There is a] need to understand the full complexity that news is and always has been, to understand the myriad biases or constraints on news, and most importantly, to understand the current digital environment that has transformed news.

News is not *just* a set of messages, a message system, or a commodity; it is a *process of participation* and *of relationships*. News is multi-player participation in an environment of shared information, influence, access, and circulation. It is a verb as much as it is a noun.

Moon Hoax of 1835, or William Randolph Hearst's *Morning Journal* publishing fake drawings of Spanish officials strip-searching American women, which set off the Spanish-American war. A third point, which is what my own work examines, and what I'll briefly explain here, is the need to understand the full complexity that news is and always has been, to understand the myriad biases or constraints on news, and most importantly, to understand the current digital environment that has transformed news. This wide scope of understanding goes far beyond what the fake-versus-real debate allows.

A first step in getting at the complexity of news requires that we stop using the term "fake." What is it that's fake? The concept is slippery, and not applicable if you view news as a social construction. As a media scholar and media literacy specialist, I have never believed in objectivity or unbiased news, no matter the medium or the source. Yet I have always believed that within the world of news, one can find instances of reliability or at least plausible

or responsible accounts of events and circumstances on which to assess the world—biases and constraints notwithstanding. I am acutely aware that all news items are constructions that are constrained by political, social, economic, aesthetic, and technological factors.

Individuals and news organizations are constrained by personal, collective, and organizational political and social biases, by traditions of journalistic training, and by organizational policies. News is also constrained by the medium for which it is constructed, which includes the space constraints of print and time constraints of broadcast, by a reliance on words and still photos in print, and by moving images, sound, graphics, and editing choices in electronic media. These are unique modes of communication, creating different impacts and, indeed, different stories. All of these constraints (and more) also apply to news online. When one considers these constraints and biases, the fake-versus-real framework is clearly too small.

Economic impact represents a major constraint on all news, in all media. News is nearly always a product to be sold to an audience, to be shared for a price. Despite what news organizations claim is the case, the power of money to determine and influence information in newspapers and other print entities, on broadcasting and cable outlets, and on the web is real and has been examined by many others at length. The economics of the Internet creates an added layer of complexity to news circulating there. Algorithms rule the day. Algorithms are mathematical models that track individual browsing and sharing. They determine the ads and information in one's personal feed. They are what search engines, social media sites, and advertisers all rely on to reach target markets. They are the financial foundation of the web. Recent pieces in the *New Yorker* and *The New York Times* have reported, correctly, that those who understand the way algorithms and social media work know how to target news in a focused and

fleeting way to clusters of people who are likely to spread information via Facebook or Twitter. This can have a profound effect on public opinion and political elections. These information targeters cannot be tracked, and social media companies are not required to keep tabs on them. Social media's algorithmic advertising model is unlike anything from the pre-digital era.

Given the constraints and biases of all media, and particularly those of the digital environment, what, then, is news today? News is a rapidly morphing genre. News is not *just* a set of messages, a message system, or a commodity; it is a *process of participation* and *of relationships*. News is multi-player participation in an environment of shared information, influence, access, and circulation. It is a verb as much as it is a noun. The legacy hierarchy of gatekeepers in traditional news organizations has collapsed. News is connection in a digisphere whose players are traditional news organizations, social networking sites, pro and amateur journalists, and everyone and everything in between, borrowing from and building on one another through links, hyper-links, and sharing. News is constructed using words, sounds, and images on social media sites, on blogs, and on commercial, government-controlled, government-influenced, and non-profit websites. It is often indistinguishable from advertising and entertainment. All the genres have blurred.

Because participation is a key factor, news aggregation has become more important than separate, authoritative sources. We need to take responsibility for our own participatory role as aggregators. My research has shown that young adults understand this. A few years back, I ran focus groups with undergraduate and graduate students in the United States and in Turkey to compare their understanding about and participation in news. One of the many interesting things I found out was that, in the world of news, these students defined "truth" not as emanating from one respected, authoritative source,

but as the result of their own efforts to find consensus among various sources. Because of their passion for a range of opinions (especially in light of government or advertising censorship), they repeatedly indicated that a wide variety of voices is necessary; for them, reading the comments of many others is a way to uncover truth. I gleaned from their word choices and overall comments that their active participation in seeking many sources and from gathering information from professionals, citizen journalists, and others allowed them to build an aggregate of information that they themselves could deem "trustworthy," "faithful," or "objective." For these students, diversity of opinion was equal to objectivity and truth, and it was up to them to do the work to literally construct that truth.

This new way of looking at news represents a notable shift in the understanding and use of the terms "objectivity" and "truth," and particularly in the importance of one's role in seeking them out. Reliability and truth were very important to the students with whom I talked, but these were to be found outside of what the students consider traditional journalism, and necessary for them to come to on their own, as a part of their participatory practice. The students' use of the terms "objective" and "truthful" as equal to "diverse perspectives" illustrates Neil Postman's argument in his book, *Technopoly*, that, as media technologies shift and, in turn, our cultural ecologies shift, the way we use and understand certain terms also shifts. Traditionally, in the realms of journalism practice and journalism education, the concepts of truth, objectivity, and reliability, among others, have been held up as measures that are applicable to individual stories, reports, and messages. But these students had re-cast those terms to mean multiple voices and multiple perspectives. Perhaps the once stalwart concepts of good journalism are shifting, just as the very definition of news has been shifting for some time as a result of shifting media forms.



The digital environment is a different landscape, and journalists and citizens alike need to understand the boundaries in this landscape, and especially how to move forward.

The rapid development of the digital environment has upset traditional journalism. The digital environment is a different landscape, and journalists and citizens alike need to understand the boundaries in this landscape, and especially how to move forward. In the participatory world of news creation and sharing, many legacy journalists, naturally threatened by the web and social media's rogue information frontier, have worked in different ways to maintain their journalistic authority and status as keepers of the truth. Some have engaged in a form of news literacy education that focuses almost entirely on training

people, mostly students, to evaluate online sources. While that skill is important, it's not nearly enough. It ignores an understanding about the other constraining factors of news, and it leaves out a broader education about the digital environment and what all media and all genres have become in this changing cultural milieu. Such a broader understanding can come only from comprehensive critical media literacy education that advocates for understanding the range and complexity of all media content and forms.

Though we call it the Fourth Estate and continue to rely on it in order to be proper participant citizens in our



democracy, to inform us about things large and small, nearby and far way, journalism is not a heroic or sacred calling. It is a social construction. It is necessary, and it changes as our media forms change. We need to understand these forms, and particularly their biases and the cultural environments they create and nurture. The American and Turkish students from my focus group study, while deft online news participants, were also conflicted in their assessment of online information. They all said that they use and revere social media as information sources. Yet, when pressed, they reported a sense of caution about overall online reliability or safety. This uneasy contradiction could be eased with comprehensive media literacy education.

Where does comprehensive media literacy begin? It begins when one takes full responsibility for understanding and participating in information production and circulation online. To that end, I've included a checklist (left) of questions to consider when examining news and information in the newspaper, on television and radio, and via online outlets—no matter the source. The questions are meant to inspire critical thinking, and to demonstrate a wide range of considerations about news and online information participation. The goal is to move away from the fake-versus-real debate and toward something deeper and more relevant to the digital environment in which we reside. ■

MEDIA LITERACY PRIMER

Questions to ask about any item of news or information on the web and in general:

- Who produced this piece? Can you tell, or is it unclear?
- What is at stake for the individual or organization responsible for this story? What do they stand to gain?
- Who is paying the bill to produce and distribute this information? Is it clear?
- What facts are included? Which might be left out? What are the unanswered questions?
- What tactics are used to get your attention, or to get you to click on the story? Are there any hyperbolic or highly charged words or phrases?
- How are visuals and sound used to get attention or elicit a click?
- How is the still or video camera used to encourage a feeling or perception?
 - What is featured or framed in a photograph? If it's a person, what is their expression? What are they doing?
 - Who are they? What camera angles are used? What is the pace of editing, if it's a video? What is the overall feel?
- Are elements of humor, such as sarcasm, used? What effect do they have?
- What sorts of sounds are included in the piece, if any? What impact do they have?

Questions to ask about your own social media practices:

- From which sources or sites am I getting my information?
- What have I decided to share? Why? Am I sharing things my friends or acquaintances have posted on social media?
- Have I sought out other sources about this same idea, event or topic?
- Have I closely examined opinions, views, or versions of a story that vary?
- When I respond to news and information others have posted, how do I engage? Do I seek to enter thoughtful discussion, or am I prone to emotional reaction? Why?



KATHERINE G. FRY teaches and publishes in the areas of media research and criticism; media ecology; media literacy; and cultural analysis of journalism. A Fulbright scholar, she examines the changing definition of news resulting from changes in communication technologies and in audience news engagement. Fry has developed, teaches, and writes about a model of activist media literacy education based on her grassroots media literacy education work as Co-Founder of the non-profit, New York City-based organization, The LAMP. She is the author of *Constructing the Heartland: Television News and Natural Disaster*, a co-editor of *Identities in Context: Media, Myth, Religion in Space the Time*, and author of numerous articles about news and media literacy.

If It's Fake, It's NOT NEWS

By Rochelle Riley



How does one report unpopular news while maintaining the trust and respect of audiences increasingly torn between seeing journalists as heroes and seeing them as traitors?

I can't imagine Harry Amana saw this coming. Amana is one of those on whose shoulders I stand as a journalist and communicator. A professor of journalism at my alma mater, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Harry taught me much of what I needed to know to have a long career in newsrooms. We studied basic ethics, basic interviewing, basic editing. We never studied basic lies and garbage. But decades later, as I make my living analyzing and commenting on the news of the day, I wish we had had more conversations about how to handle the latest trend in news: obvious lying. How does one report unpopular news while maintaining the trust and respect of audiences increasingly torn between seeing journalists as heroes and seeing them as traitors?

It is past time for journalists to take a page from [Ida B. Wells Barnett]. We must treat the campaign to make us irrelevant as what it is: an attack on democracy.



Perhaps our answer lies in taking back the role we have relegated to politicians: teaching audiences about the history of journalism, about the heroes and heroines whose crusades and dedication made our craft.

Perhaps we should pay more attention to the work and legacy of Ida B. Wells Barnett, who was born the child of slaves in Mississippi. She became a teacher whose first righteous complaint was that white teachers made \$50 more a month than she did.

Rosa Parks was not the first to refuse to give up her seat, not in 1955, not in our history. In 1884, Wells sued the train company that had kicked her out of the first-class seat that she had bought. She won the case, but after the verdict was overturned on appeal, she wrote: "O God, is there no... justice in this land for us?"

Her greatest and most heartbreaking work came after a black friend of hers was lynched by a white mob whose initial anger was only that his grocery store was competing successfully against a white-owned store.

Wells urged black people to leave Memphis. More than 6,000 did. Thus began an anti-lynching campaign that must continue today.

It is past time for journalists to take a page from Wells. We must treat the campaign to make us irrelevant as what it is: an attack on democracy.

It is not enough for us to assume that readers, listeners, and viewers cannot be fooled. Our very industry is under attack. We are a tweet away from being treated as irrelevant. And it is happening at a time when journalism is needed more than ever.

We, the media, let politicians and lobbyists and bullies and liars take over part of our jobs, the part where we were supposed to bring our audiences with us. We let political terrorists define us, redefine our industry, diminish our work.

We can fight back, as an industry, the way we always have, by offering an absolute authority and unrelenting excellence that can withstand attack from those who would wish away the Fourth Estate.

Hate crimes are increasing. The Fourth Estate is under siege. People cannot tell the difference between those of us who are trained to help them find the truth and some guy sitting in his underwear in a basement in Wisconsin (or Macedonia) declaring that his news is real.

We, the media, let politicians and lobbyists and bullies and liars take over part of our jobs, the part where we were supposed to bring our audiences with us.

We let political terrorists define us, redefine our industry, diminish our work.

And now it's time for us to stop.

We must stop using the term "fake news." If it's fake, it's not news. Call it what it is: lies and garbage.

We must no longer let people such as Kellyanne Conway and Steve Bannon determine our lexicon, then turn around and teach that to America.

The American people are demanding more of us journalists. So we must step up and give it to them, not be angry that they are NOT so discerning.

We can fight back, as an industry, the way we always have, by offering an absolute authority and unrelenting excellence that can withstand attack from those who would wish away the Fourth Estate.

We must learn what Wells, the writer, editor, suffragist, and feminist, taught us: Everything is local. Every national event, every global issue affects people down the street. We just need to make audiences understand that.

Every column I've ever written has been for my grandmother, Lowney Hilliard Pitt, who lived her entire life in a small town in eastern North Carolina, and who needed to understand every issue that was being debated in Washington, every crime that was committed in New York and every politician who was lying in Detroit or Chicago or Philadelphia.

It all affected her.

If we remember our job—and do the job—it will be easier for us to continue to train new generations to continue to tell the story. If we remember those on whose

shoulders we stand, we can reclaim the right to define ourselves. If we teach our audiences the history and necessity of our industry, rather than assume that they know, we can continue a tradition that literally upholds our way of life.

We must make sure that 100 years from now, the name of the late Ida B. Wells is spoken with reverence and awareness.

We must make sure the name Gwen Ifill, the late longtime anchor at PBS and host of *Washington Week*, is forever spoken with pride and care. Forever.

Ida B. Wells died at age 68 in Chicago. She left a legacy that is deserving of teaching in all American schools. Her name should be known to all children, regardless of their color or station. Her motto is mine: "One had better die fighting against injustice than to die like a dog or a rat in a trap."

The fight will be hard, according to my professor, Harry Amana, because we have ignored it for so long.

"On the one hand, the degree to which we've come to this, I don't think any of us could have foreseen that," Harry says. "But on the other hand, when you realize anything about the world of advertising and public relations and the way that people have been able to slant images to influence our opinions about things, a lot of this *was* predictable. I think that we've been nurtured on a program that invites us to take shortcuts... We want black-and-white answers. We want them quickly, and we don't want them to be too complicated. And Madison Avenue perfected the response to that.

"That's what we get now," he says. "Anything that's too complex and has to be rationally thought about, we're not accepting that. That's on the right and the left. We look for easy ways out... and there's no such thing. So, it's very easy for a person like our president now... First we had Ronald Reagan, a B-movie actor, then we had The Terminator Governor (Arnold Schwarzenegger), and now we've got what we've got in the White House,

and they're all products of the thing that we've become: media drones, media robots. We've been taught that the way to think about things is through shortcuts. That's what we're getting."

Now, we must juggle saving our industry with doing the jobs that continue to make our industry relevant.

The road back will be hard.

"With the decline of print journalism," Harry says, "and the rise in broadcast journalism, and with the limited budgets they're getting, and with little time to do comprehensive, investigative journalism on the air, it doesn't look good. The answers are all out there now on the web. People can find out what the real deal is, but when it comes to mainstream media, we look at things that reinforce what we're already thinking."

That we even have to fight for the soul of our industry is not something that my old college professor Harry and I ever talked about before, professor to

student, journalist to journalist. This is not something we saw coming.

But now that we have seen it, we have two jobs: to offer excellent journalism, and to make sure our audiences know what journalism is. Some universities already are responding. The School of Journalism at Michigan State University is offering a course, open to all students, that explores the rise of fake stories.

Its purpose, according to *MSU Today*, is to "inform all Spartans on media literacy, teaching students how to analyze and evaluate media and how fake news differs from traditional news content.

Rachel Mourao, the assistant professor who will teach the course, "Media Literacy in the Age of Fake News," said: "We want students to be able to navigate all of the different sources of information that they come across."

I hope Communication scholars nationwide will join that quest. ■



ROCHELLE RILEY is a columnist and radio talk show host whose columns can be read at www.freep.com/rochelleriley and whose show can be heard on www.910amsuperstation.com. She is the author of *The Burden: African Americans and the Enduring Impact of Slavery* (Wayne State University Press), which will be released in February 2018. And, she is the winner of the National Association of Black Journalists' 2017 Ida B. Wells Award and the Society of Professional Journalists' 2017 Eugene Pulliam Fellowship.

ON THE DANGERS OF FAKΣ NEWS AND FAKΣ SKΕPTICISM

By Steven Alan Carr, Ph.D.

Charges of “fake news” would hardly pass muster with the news media’s own criteria for what constitutes news. The charges are not particularly timely or unusual, at least within the past hundred years. At best, they appeal to long-standing mistrust of both media and, in a more general sense, modernity. Short on specifics, these charges are as evocative as they are stubborn, a bulwark against encroaching urbanism and consumer cultures. As a visceral response, they strike back with a simulated world-weariness of ennui and unease. Rather than serving a public interest, they strive to make grandiose claims of serving a broader interest. They do a better job of manipulating and undermining it.

The proliferation of these charges amid the chaos of the Trump presidency has resuscitated both ideologies and language I once believed had been thoroughly discredited following World War II. One need not look much past “Make America Great Again” to find rousing

and nasty strains of “America First.” Such slogans connect 2017 extremist political discourses back to a pre-Holocaust America, one that could look upon Muslim refugees today with the same disdain that once accompanied repeatedly slamming doors on Jewish families fleeing Nazi Europe throughout the 1930s. All of this got me thinking about a speech one-time aviation superstar Charles Lindbergh gave in Fort Wayne on October 3, 1941, a rally against both foreigners and media that drew 4,000 people in the city in which I now teach Communication classes at Indiana U—Purdue U Fort Wayne. Surely all of that righteous fury didn’t simply dissipate into the cultural ether after 1941.

Be concerned with these historically cyclical Trojan Horse charges, bearing gifts of oppositional stances to an imagined mainstream and conventional wisdom. Be very concerned with kinder and gentler veneers upon the same old hateful postures. What seems new, at least this time, is how these postures now get amplified through a labyrinth

Be concerned with these historically cyclical Trojan Horse charges, bearing gifts of oppositional stances to an imagined mainstream and conventional wisdom. Be very concerned with kinder and gentler veneers upon the same old hateful postures.



If you are a faculty member, department chair, or dean, expect to see your most valuable commodity—the flexible, curious, and critical mindset a broad-based college education produces—coming under even greater external threats and pressures in this climate.

of communication piping and platforms that promote insulation and customization without the messiness of face-to-face human interaction. The “fake skepticism” of these postures means to do harm to core democratic institutions. These include not just basic professional and ethical standards of a watchdog free press, but the core function of our colleges and universities. If you are a faculty member, department chair, or dean, expect to see your most valuable commodity—the flexible, curious, and critical mindset a broad-based college education produces—coming under even greater external threats and pressures in this climate.

Not only is your most valuable commodity essential to a healthy democracy, one where an informed and reasoned electorate must know how to evaluate and analyze reliable information to make difficult public choices. It also makes good occupational sense. The work of faculty in Communication and in some other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences does not map easily or precisely to a single profession or trade. The current political climate, which demands a literalness of one-to-one occupational accountability, more frequently holds against you the intangible values of intellectual capital and the quality of life your institution brings to your students and your communities because their metrics do not always quantify neatly within an Excel spreadsheet. Yet the intellectual flexibility and resourcefulness promoted within this environment, and cultivated through a broadened curriculum, are exactly what the next five years will demand. The narrowed professional and competency-based training some political, business, and even academic leaders now clamor

for better serves imagined short-term and immediate industrial needs, some of which have already become obsolete. Technical training alone will never prepare the coming workforce for a world full of self-driving trucks, artificially intelligent home robots, or video editing software that can realistically alter a recording of any public figure to say whatever you want it to say, done in real time. That workforce, educated within the next five years, will need to know how to navigate a world that hasn't yet imagined the roster of skills, efficiencies, and processes necessary to conduct their jobs, all within a still highly volatile cultural context.

Europe offers us a template for how easily those with a political agenda can deploy fake skepticism to leverage extremism within this unstable context. Reporting by National Public Radio's *On the Media* in the summer of 2016 showed how the far-right German nationalist Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West (PEGIDA) had gained a foothold among the German public in its campaign against Syrian refugees. Although the head of PEGIDA was forced to resign after posing as Adolf Hitler on social media and posting pictures of white supremacists on Facebook, with captions reading “Three Ks a day keeps the minorities away,” the organization ultimately downplayed its historical linkages to Aryanism and racial purity. Instead, PEGIDA's rhetoric assailed a much more socially acceptable scapegoat: the media. Attendees at weekly PEGIDA rallies across Germany regularly broke into chants of *Lügenpresse*—“the lying media.”

When *On the Media* interviewed Uwe Vetterick, the editor of the biggest newspaper in Dresden, he

Yet the intellectual flexibility and resourcefulness promoted within this environment, and cultivated through a broadened curriculum, are exactly what the next five years will demand.



cited a telephone survey showing that half of his readers either believed that refugees disproportionately committed crimes, or that readers weren't sure whether the newspaper was covering up the criminals' identities because they were refugees. “Basically, half our readers believe we are hiding something from them,” Uwe Vetterick told reporter Ilya Marritz. “Or they're not sure whether we might be hiding something.” Half of the newspaper's readers found reason to disbelieve the newspaper, not because of evidence or logic presented to them, but because their absence couldn't confirm what readers already had made up in their own minds. That absence somehow confirmed the stereotypes educated readers expected or wanted to see.

This fake skepticism, one that only requires an absence of reason and evidence to find confirmation of its worldview, is neither specifically German nor even a modern-day European phenomenon. More than 75 years ago, Lindbergh became the face of the America First Committee, an isolationist organization that was virulently



Charles Lindbergh speaking at an America First Committee rally.

opposed to the Roosevelt administration, U.S. entry into World War II, and what it saw as Jewish control over the media. In a speech delivered in Des Moines, Iowa, on September 11, 1941, Lindbergh warned that Jews presented the single “greatest danger to this country” due to “their large ownership and influence in our motion pictures, our press, our radio and our government.”

Less than a month after his infamous Iowa speech, Lindbergh spoke again in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Driving out moderate and pacifist members, America First now hoped to forge new alliances with the likes of the KKK and the German-American Bund. Against this backdrop, Lindbergh drew an audience of 4,000 people. After welcomes and introductions from city dignitaries such as Mayor Harry Baals, Lindbergh spoke. He warned that this would be the last time he could speak, before President Roosevelt declared martial law and suspended outright both free speech and free elections. Like Hitler did in Nazi Germany. Congress had become another Reichstag. “Foreigners who advocate war” already found the doors to lecture halls wide open. America First found them slammed shut. “Propaganda from Moscow” already took banner headlines, while America First's “facts and arguments against war” were buried in the paper, if they appeared at all. The speech was broadcast nationwide over hundreds of NBC radio stations. The next day, details and extensive quotations from the speech appeared on the front page of *The New York Times*.

Overheated charges of fake news today evoke Lindbergh's 1941 victim-status rants against interventionist propaganda. Certainly, reliable and accurate news must play a vital role in any democracy, and we should always

If every mediated message was potentially a Big Lie, why should anyone have believed eyewitness reports of violent Nazi persecution throughout the 1930s? Or reliable reports today of Syrian refugees fleeing a murderous Assad regime? Or the science behind impending catastrophes of climate change?

remain concerned about the quality of that news and our news institutions. However, if we treat that news with a healthy dose of skepticism, we also should treat unfounded and wild-eyed charges of “liberal bias,” “fake news,” or “propaganda” with at least the same dosage. Lindbergh’s charge of propaganda came accessorized with its own hateful agenda. That agenda played nicely with an already established tradition of American racism and anti-Semitism, both well-tolerated throughout much of polite society before World War II. Hatred for an increasingly pluralistic democracy could latch on to an older root structure, already in place, and could score a few cheap political points against the Roosevelt administration in the process.

Nazism, too, had its version of “fake news,” which it celebrated as the Big Lie. If repeated loudly and frequently enough, a lie could seduce the masses into believing it as true. But both the Nazis and their opponents oversold the concept. The Big Lie didn’t work because people eventually believed in it. It worked because it sowed just enough doubt in the things that already made many uncomfortable to begin with, such as holding authoritarian leaders accountable and standing up for those citizens who had been persecuted by their own government. If every mediated message was potentially a Big Lie, why should anyone have believed eyewitness reports of violent Nazi persecution throughout the 1930s? Or reliable reports today of Syrian refugees fleeing a murderous Assad regime? Or the science behind impending catastrophes of climate change?

Like charges of “fake news” today, charges of propaganda then played upon fears and imperfections in the system to justify and amplify anti-democratic tendencies that were hardly ready to shrivel up and die in the face of a changing America. Communication

that inconveniently disrupts complacent worldviews in and of itself is neither fake nor propaganda. Labeling it as such, though, is effective at promoting intolerant and closed mindsets. To be sure, we should dislike and remain intolerant of some extreme views, such as Holocaust denial and distortion. And our core democratic institutions certainly have many imperfections. Yet we frequently tolerate the bad ideas, not because we believe in them, but because we have faith in a system with a pretty good track record for letting the better ideas eventually win out. If we dwell, in an endless feedback loop, upon the fact that bad ideas occasionally enter the system, or that the news media might occasionally miss something of importance to some, we risk losing sight of some very real and pressing threats to our democracy and global stability. We also risk playing right into the hands of those who would prefer we do nothing at all, except let authoritarian leaders make unilateral decisions on behalf of the people.

Doing nothing frequently serves the interests of a status quo, especially when that status quo has a vested interest in making sure that the public stays put, so the privileged can continue to enjoy privilege, free from the glare of democratic accountability, or from an individual conscience. American inertia served the interests of those who did not want to see an influx of Jewish refugees coming to this country, as much as it now serves the interests of those who see women and children refugees from Syria as a national security threat, or those who wish to criminalize people on the basis of citizenship, or those who believe we should shield powerful leaders from even the most minimal levels of accountability, all the while cynically promising to make America first and great again. Yes, we should be concerned about fake news and the health of our democracy. We should

If we dwell upon the fact that bad ideas occasionally enter the system, or that the news media might occasionally miss something of importance to some, we risk losing sight of some very real and pressing threats to our democracy and global stability. We also risk playing right into the hands of those who would prefer we do nothing at all.

also be concerned about fake skepticism and the claims of the powerful, who see themselves as victims, afflicted by communication that is inconvenient to their narrow personal agendas and their anti-democratic ambitions to consolidate unilateral power.

As Communication educators and university administrators, we have a role to play. A university education remains critical, not just in teaching students cutting-edge skills that will help get them employed. Those skills will always be in demand. The ability to sift through and evaluate evidence. To put the reigning ideas to the test, and strive to come up with better ones.

To systematically gather evidence, and make effective arguments based on that evidence. But even beyond those cutting-edge skills of analysis and reason, our product is not the student, nor is it the college graduate. Our product is the greater good we provide to a healthy democracy. And that democracy can only be as healthy as the healthy skepticism our curricula instill for the global citizens who, in the future, will face difficult choices and questions for which there are no easy or simplistic answers. ■

Note: This article is revised and expanded from an editorial that originally appeared in The Fort Wayne Journal Gazette.



STEVEN ALAN CARR is Professor of Communication and Director of the Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne. He is the author of *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism: A Cultural History Up to World War II*, and co-author with Jennifer Frost of the forthcoming volume, *Teaching United States History Through “Message Movies.”*

When Words Lose Their Meaning: Counterfactual Advocacy, Donald Trump, and the Rise of Despotic Populism

By Steven R. Goldzwig, Ph.D.

“Counterfactual Advocacy” is a discourse designed to deny, evade, or misdirect its audiences from facts, inferences, or descriptions of events that might provide the kind of transparency we need in a democratic society to make the best assessment of and useful decisions about our present reality. In a political environment, counterfactual advocacy taints and disrupts public policy processes and products. While this definition is formative rather than definitive, the formulation provides a baseline for interpreting our present circumstances.

Counterfactual advocacy has now seemingly led to a counterfactual advocacy industry. Its leader and chief spokesperson is Donald J. Trump. Assisted by the rise of what has been labeled the alt-right, the 2016 presidential election

campaign unleashed a number of ethical dilemmas that promise to challenge our new president and our national will. Trump has become a lightning rod and a platform for several unsavory developments, including but not limited to instances of rampant misogyny, racism, chauvinism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia.

Given these alarming developments, I want to interrogate the ongoing deleterious effects of a present brand of public discourse—a discourse that threatens the realization of a more perfect union, savages the commonweal, and tears at the fabric of the republic. I want to touch upon four key themes: 1.) the assault on truth and expertise; 2.) Trump’s demagoguery; 3.) Trump’s version of populism; and 4.) why words matter.



THE ASSAULT ON TRUTH

The assault on truth did not begin with Trump, but it arrives in an atmosphere and environment conducive to the alternative reality that has been the subject of much commentary and no little worry. Fernbach and Sloman (2017) suggest that while “individual ignorance” is often our “natural state,” that same ignorance can “prompt us to demand expertise and nuanced analysis from our leaders, which is the only tried and true way to make policy.” Yet, thus far with the Trump administration, policy does not seem to derive from the painstaking prior analysis and the application of expertise that make outcomes predictable. In fact, as we all know, expertise is questioned at every

turn—think climate change and global warming, think deregulation of the administrative state.

Tom Nichols (2017) argues compellingly that the death of expertise is partially, but not insignificantly, due to a growing narcissism that has led to less belief in the value of expertise. Random “facts” washing over us as we engage in dozens and dozens of mouse clicks do not necessarily make us experts; in fact, after such exposure, we might even find ourselves in an inferior intellectual position—but wholly unaware of our deficit. The result is that reasoned, evidenced-based argument as a defining ingredient in our democracy is slowly disappearing. When we add in a seemingly narcissistic president with a penchant for demagoguery, we exacerbate this growing problem.



Trump, like McCarthy, has employed untruths and distortion with abandon.

Like McCarthy, Trump seems to believe that “dramatic lies are more attractive than prosaic truth.” Like McCarthy, Trump has shown an “indifference to ideas” and a “lack of interest in democratic processes by means of which ideas are examined, tested, and modified.”

TRUMP'S MCCARTHYISM

Joe McCarthy's rhetorical methods certainly parallel Trump's. One might consult Barnet Baskerville's (1954) classic article on Joseph McCarthy to find resonance. In classic demagogic fashion, Trump, like McCarthy, has employed untruths and distortion with abandon. Like McCarthy, Trump seems to believe that “dramatic lies are more attractive than prosaic truth.” Like McCarthy, Trump has shown an “indifference to ideas” and a “lack of interest in democratic processes by means of which ideas are examined, tested, and modified.” Like McCarthy, Trump has displayed “an imperious refusal to listen to replies to his accusations,” and this is “matched by an equally imperious refusal to reply rationally to charges made against him.” Like McCarthy, Trump “hits and he runs; he makes reckless assertions which he cannot prove.”

DESPOTIC POPULISM

At this writing, one pines for one iota of public interest—or even a scintilla of old-fashioned shame—in place of Trump's dogged continuance of the grandiose lifestyle he adopted before taking office. If this lifestyle reflects a populist agenda, I am hard-pressed to find it.

The idea of a billionaire populist summons an eerie, oxymoronic ring. Trump's economic nationalism, disguised rhetorically as a populist movement, is belied by a truckload of evidence, including the fact that he chose a number of plutocrats to head his cabinet posts, in some cases charging them with dismantling or definitively delegitimizing the traditional powers and regulatory statutes that defined, enforced, and protected their missions. The alleged goal: the deconstruction of the administrative state. I find a thoroughly despotic thread in that type of “populism.” As Marc Fisher (2017) notes, “Trump has managed to blend left-wing populism, which tends to target Wall Street billionaires and corporate leaders as oppressors of the working class, with right-wing populism, which generally targets civil servants, intellectuals, the media, and racial minorities and immigrants.” Rhetorically, then, Trump's populism is an odd hybrid; such a discourse reflects both the left and the right. It can hardly be seen in terms of traditional Republican philosophical and political principles—and still less in terms of traditional Republican discourse.

Today, we are simultaneously experiencing a rise in authoritarianism as well as an unparalleled surfacing of incompetence. In my view, despotic populism displays the classic signatures of authoritarian regimes in which

If all claims are equal, and their supporting evidence either unexamined or summarily and arrogantly ignored, we flatten the lifeblood of the human heart and pose significant obstacles to human action on behalf of social change.

rule is accomplished by demagogic practices and preferred governance reflects a penchant for dictatorial rule. Trump's rhetorical forays display a narcissistic authoritarianism that skirts democratic values and practices. His mercurial self-centeredness brooks few critics.

WORDS MATTER

Rhetoric and public policy are hampered by a perfidious shortsighted assumption that what anybody says, regardless of truth or accuracy, is merely a part of the “new normal” in public discourse. This is an assumption with devastating consequences. If all claims are equal, and their supporting evidence either unexamined or summarily and arrogantly ignored, we flatten the lifeblood of the human heart and pose significant obstacles to human action on behalf of social change. We each have a stake in trying to turn back

this gathering storm. In that endeavor, words matter. As NCA President Stephen Hartnett (2017) recently observed, we must “proceed with the understanding that communication both reflects objective conditions and shapes them.” This belief challenges us to “cherish the importance of ethical, evidence-based, careful speech that is linked to slow, deliberate, and responsive listening.” Here lay the seeds of intervention. ■

Excerpted from a paper presented at the biennial 2017 Nieman Conference: “Discerning the Truth in the 2016 Presidential Election,” Monday March 27, 2017, Alumni Memorial Union, Marquette University. Reprinted from NCA's Communication Currents at <https://www.natcom.org/communication-currents/when-words-lose-their-meaning-counterfactual-advocacy-donald-trump-and-rise>.



STEVEN R. GOLDZWIG is a Professor in the Department of Communication Studies and the Diederich College of Communication at Marquette University. His publications on the contemporary presidency have appeared in *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, *Communication Monographs*, *Western Journal of Communication*; and *Southern Communication Journal*, among others. He is the author of *Truman's Whistle-Stop Campaign* and co-author of *In a Perilous Hour: The Public Address of John F. Kennedy* [with George N. Dionisopoulos].

**Assistant Professor
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona**

We invite applications for the position of Assistant Professor of Communication. Duties and Responsibilities: Teach undergraduate courses in Interpersonal Communication, Advanced Interpersonal Communication, Communication: The Dark Side, Communication Theory, and one or more of the following undergraduate courses: Negotiation and Conflict Resolution, Persuasion, Research Methods, Advanced Research Methods, and additional courses in the candidate's areas of expertise. Position requires excellence in teaching and advising, research and publication, and service to the Department, the College, and the University. Minimum Qualifications: Ph.D. in Communication (completed no later than August 1, 2018). Previous teaching experience. Demonstrated potential for continued and substantive scholarly research and publication. Demonstrated ability to contribute to the diversity and excellence of the academic community through research, teaching, and/or service; and to commit to teaching and working in a multicultural environment. Date of Appointment: Fall 2018. Consideration of completed applications will begin on December 1, 2017 and will continue until the position is filled. An online application process will be used. To apply, please go directly to <https://class.cpp.edu/apply-com-interpersonal>. For additional assistance, please email Victoria Key, Administrative Support Coordinator, at vmkey@cpp.edu. California State Polytechnic University, Pomona is an Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action Employer.

This institution offers benefits to same-sex and to different-sex domestic partners.

This institution offers benefits to spouses.

**Assistant Professor
Baylor University**

Baylor University is a private Christian university and a nationally ranked research institution, consistently listed with highest honors among The Chronicle of Higher Education's "Great Colleges to Work For." The university is recruiting new faculty with a deep commitment to excellence in teaching, research, and scholarship. Baylor seeks faculty who share in our aspiration to become a tier one research institution while strengthening our distinctive Christian mission as described in our strategic vision, Pro Futuris (<http://www.baylor.edu/profuturis/>). As the world's largest Baptist University, Baylor offers more than 40 doctoral programs and has almost 17,000 students from all 50 states and more than 80 countries.

Baylor seeks to fill the following tenure-track faculty position within the College of Arts and Sciences: Assistant Professor of Communication.

The Department of Communication at Baylor University invites applications for a tenure-track Assistant Professor position specializing in Health Communication. A Ph.D. in Communication is required. A completed application includes: a letter of interest, curriculum vitae, official transcripts, three letters of reference, and a sample of scholarship.

To learn more about the above position, the College of Arts and Sciences, and Baylor University, please visit www.baylor.edu/communication/; www.baylor.edu/artsandsciences/?_buref=1155-90749 or www.baylor.edu/hr/facultypositions.

Baylor University is a private not-for-profit university affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas. As an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity employer, Baylor is committed to compliance with all applicable anti-discrimination laws, including those regarding age, race, color, sex, national origin, marital status, pregnancy status, military service, genetic information, and disability. As a religious educational institution, Baylor is lawfully permitted to consider an applicant's religion as a selection criterion. Baylor encourages women, minorities, veterans, and individuals with disabilities to apply.

This institution chooses not to disclose its domestic partner benefits policy.

This institution chooses not to disclose its spousal benefits policy.

**Assistant Professor
Purdue University**

The Brian Lamb School of Communication at Purdue University invites applications for two tenure-track Assistant Professor positions whose research and teaching center on (a) Strategic Political Communication and (b) Public Relations and Political Communication. The successful applicants will join a growing area of study at the undergraduate and graduate levels in the Lamb School and complement existing strengths in mass communication, public relations, and organizational communication. Teaching responsibilities will include undergraduate and graduate courses as well as graduate advising. Purdue University's Research Park is home to the C-SPAN Archives, and we welcome applications from scholars whose research and teaching might use this resource.

Strategic Political Communication Position Description: The successful applicant will have a research and teaching record centering on media and political communication. The position requires a Ph.D. in Communication or related discipline.

The ideal candidate will explore the influence of mediated communication processes, messages, or emerging communication technologies on individual or collective political attitudes and behaviors. Possible contexts for research and teaching include the influence and effects of traditional and digital communication technologies, public discourse from government leaders, news media and journalism, or media and public opinion.

Screening of applications will begin on October 15, 2017, and will continue to be accepted until the position is filled. A background check will be required for employment in this position. A complete application includes: a letter of application, curriculum vitae, statement of research interests (max. 2 pages), evidence of teaching effectiveness (max. 2 pages), no more than two publications, and names and contact information for three references. Send application materials electronically to Allison Loy at polcom17@purdue.edu. Questions regarding the position or application process should be directed to Dr. Josh Boyd, Search Committee Chair, boyd@purdue.edu or 765.494.3333.

Public Relations and Political Communication Position Description: The successful applicant will have a research and teaching record focused on public relations, with an interest in political communication. The position requires a Ph.D. in Communication or related discipline.

Undergraduate teaching would sometimes include a large lecture Introduction to Public Relations course and special topics courses in the candidate's area of specialty. Industry or government experience in public relations, advertising, political campaigns, or strategic communications is desirable.

Screening of applications will begin on October 15, 2017, and will continue to be accepted until the position is filled. A background check will be required for employment in this position. A complete application includes: a letter of application, curriculum vitae, statement of research interests (max. 2 pages), evidence of teaching effectiveness (max. 2 pages), no more than two publications, and names and contact information for three references. Send application materials electronically to Allison Loy at pr17@purdue.edu. Questions regarding the position or application process should be directed to Dr. Josh Boyd, Search Committee Chair, boyd@purdue.edu or 765.494.3333.

Purdue's main campus is located in West Lafayette, Indiana, a welcoming and diverse community with a wide variety of cultural activities and events, and industries.

Purdue University's Brian Lamb School of Communications is committed to advancing diversity in all areas of faculty effort, including scholarship, instruction, and engagement. Candidates should address at least one of these areas in their cover letter, indicating their past experiences, current interests or activities, and/or future goals to promote a climate that values diversity and inclusion.

Purdue University is an EOE/AA employer. All individuals, including minorities, women, individuals with disabilities, and veterans are encouraged to apply.

This institution offers benefits to same-sex and to different-sex domestic partners.

This institution offers benefits to spouses.

**Assistant Professor
Purdue University**

The Brian Lamb School of Communication at Purdue University invites applications for a tenure-track Assistant Professor in Risk Communication. We seek an engaged scholar/teacher who has interests in areas such as message planning, the assessment and effect of risk messages, judgment and decision making, strategic communication of risk, crisis management, or risk in interpersonal and/or mediated contexts. We are especially interested in candidates whose interests intersect with other areas in our School, such as Health Communication, Interpersonal Communication, Organizational Communication, Public Relations, Media/Technology/Society, or Media and Politics.

The successful candidate will conduct research, advise graduate students, teach undergraduate and graduate level

courses, and perform service. Such a candidate will have a Ph.D. in Communication (or related field such as psychology, management, or other social or behavioral science) and an innovative program of research. The candidate should have interests in engaging with interdisciplinary research teams or centers on campus (e.g., Regenstrief Center for Healthcare Engineering, Center for the Environment, Center for Education and Research in Information Assurance and Security, Center for Families, and/or the Colleges of Engineering and Science). The candidate must be prepared for teaching, collaborating with, and mentoring both graduate and undergraduate students. We seek a colleague who will develop and teach new and existing undergraduate and graduate courses in his/her areas of interest. The potential for securing extramural funding is desirable.

Screening of applications will begin on October 23, 2017 and will continue until the position is filled. A background check will be required for employment in this position. A complete application includes a letter of application, curriculum vitae, statement of research interests, evidence of teaching effectiveness, and names and contact information for three references. Purdue University's Brian Lamb School of Communication is committed to advancing diversity in all areas of faculty effort, including scholarship, instruction, and engagement. Candidates should address at least one of these areas in their cover letter, indicating their past experiences, current interests or activities, and/or future goals to promote a climate that values diversity and inclusion. Send application materials electronically to Allison Loy (riskcom@purdue.edu). Questions regarding the position or application process can also be directed to Dr. Felicia Roberts, Search Committee Chair (riskcom@purdue.edu); 765-494-3323.

Purdue's main campus is located in West Lafayette, Indiana, a welcoming and diverse community with a wide variety of cultural activities and events, industries, and excellent schools. All qualified individuals will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, religion, color, sex, national origin or ancestry, genetic information, marital status, parental status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability, or status as a veteran.

Purdue University is an EOE/AA employer. All individuals, including minorities, women, individuals with disabilities, and veterans are encouraged to apply.

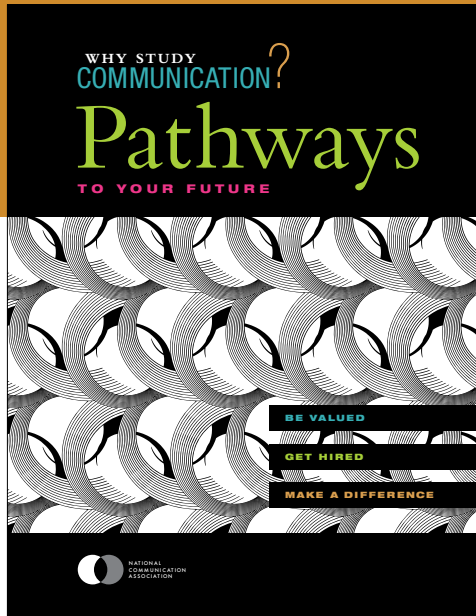
This institution offers benefits to same-sex and to different-sex domestic partners.

This institution offers benefits to spouses.

Photo credits:

Page 9: Shutterstock/Scanrail1 and iStock/rzarek; page 10: Wikimedia Commons, Frederic Remington, 1897; page 13: Shutterstock/gior; page 14: iStock/kuppa_rock; page 15: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; page 19: iStock/guwendemir; page 21: (upper) Shutterstock/stock_photo_world and (lower) Wikimedia Commons; page 25: Shutterstock/chrisdorney; and page 26: Wikimedia Commons, Herbert Block, 1950.

A RESOURCE FROM NCA



Take advantage of special
back-to-school prices on *Pathways!*

This resource for prospective and new undergraduate Communication students provides a wealth of information about the Communication discipline; what Communication majors will know, understand, and be able to do after graduation; and career and study options for Communication graduates.

ORDER NOW!

Bulk order
discounts available

WWW.NATCOM.ORG/BOOKSTORE



NATIONAL
COMMUNICATION
ASSOCIATION

1765 N Street NW
Washington, DC 20036

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Merrifield VA
Permit No. 2333