

# The history behind “fake news”

“Fake news” craze little more than new-age propaganda

by Marie O'Connor

Surprisingly, fake news was not invented by an administration trying to disprove opposing news outlets. Fake news outlets have been around much longer than CNN and the failing New York Times.

The actual definition of fake news originated to describe any news that's goal is to provide false information.

Satirical news sources such as The Onion, that provided fake stories for the purpose of entertainment and humor used to be considered fake news.

Even before outlets like The Onion, fake news in the form of propaganda has been used for centuries, as far back as political elections of ancient Rome.

Works of art from the Roman empire depict the emperors as brave, handsome gods, and portrayed scenes of great valor, contrasting historical accounts.

Fake news is often synonymous with propaganda. Without any intention of humor or satirical value, governments from the US to the Soviet Union have used propaganda.



An example of a political propaganda poster from Soviet Union Poland circa 1920 | Wikimedia Commons

Organizations or administrations throughout history have lied to the public, these lies often go unchecked.

During WWI and WWII, as most obvious examples, the US took advantage of fake news and published racist advertisements to gain public support.

The intention of fake news since the onset of the internet has been to generate “click revenue” with sites like BuzzFeed and Red-

dit using absurd headlines and fabricated stories to draw readership.

Fake news sites like these also found a new market and hungry readership in political conversations.

From Huffington Post on the far left, to Breitbart on the right, news stories are stolen and adjusted from other sites, or entirely fabricated.

In recent history, however, fake news has ventured from second rate news websites to dominating the

mainstream media and infiltrating the most influential house in the country.

What started as a strategic ploy used by campaign manager Kellyanne Conway as a way to support Trump while debunking liberal news sources, has now become a joke after being used haphazardly by the president.

During a press conference, then president-elect Trump dismissed CNN Correspondent Jim Acosta and his questions about Trump's alleged

relationship with Russia during the election, by saying, “I'm not going to give you a question. You are fake news.”

Since the first shouts about fake news, and denying reporters from attending White House press briefings, Trump has managed to drag out the fake news conversation for months.

In February, the POTUS tweeted, “FAKE NEWS media knowingly doesn't tell the truth. A great danger to our country. The failing @nytimes has become a joke. Likewise @CNN. Sad!”

Only last week on April 17, he again hit Twitter saying, “The Fake Media (not Real Media) has gotten even worse since the election. Every story is badly slanted. We have to hold them to the truth!”

The term fake news now applies to anything the current administration deems false, damaging, or in some way paints them in a bad light.

Claiming a news channel, newspaper, or website does not have the authority to report the news, is a way to ignore facts that do not appeal to a certain perspective.

This confirmation bias prevents new perspectives from being taken seriously, and only relies on narrow viewpoints for everything happening in the country and around the world.

## Online echo chambers thrive

The prevalence of social media has coincided with the creation of political echo chambers

by Emily Wong

With the rise of digitized news and its prevalence on social media platforms, people are finding it increasingly easier to access information from a multitude of sources.

However, most people only end up reading from a small percentage of those publications.

The periodicals that make it into this chosen few often happen to share the same views held by the reader.

Responsibility for this occurrence lies partly on the readers and partly on the app or website for cycling the article through their feed. Regardless of who takes the blame, people are starting to see this as a problem.

The phenomenon of only seeing media that agrees with one's viewpoint is commonly referred to as an echo chamber.

Social Scientists Walter Quattrociocchi, Antonio Scala, Cass Sunstein define echo chambers as “how users tend to promote their favorite narratives, form polarized groups, and resist information that doesn't conform to their beliefs.”

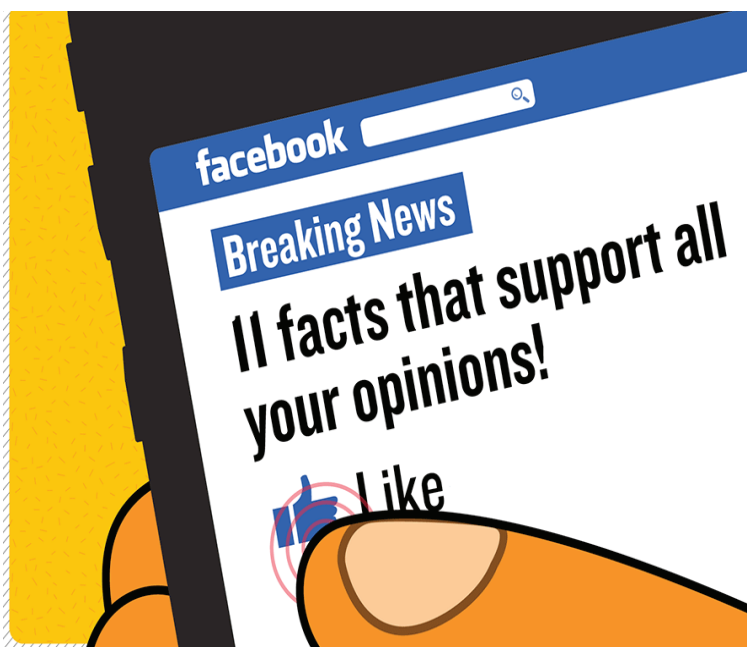
Digital echo chambers are often the result of logical and reasonable decisions on both the part of the user and the website or search engine.

An article from the New York Daily News explained Google's role in this, saying, “Google set for itself a goal of making sure that the thing you were most interested in turned up at the top of the list.”

In order to do that, it developed algorithms to follow your search and click history.”

Since most users will naturally want to read more articles with their same viewpoints, it makes sense that this cycle is perpetuated.

To add to the information bias, most people tend to be friends with



Facebook has made it easy to participate in an echo chamber. | theday.com

those with similar beliefs to their own, political or otherwise. Therefore, most of the opinions and articles that their friends share on Facebook or another social media website will reinforce their own beliefs.

This can contribute to political division and extremism, making it more difficult to empathize with those with opposing beliefs.

*“I think people should always hear multiple perspectives,” she said.*

*“News should just be news, not opinion.”*

According to the New York Times, “Among like-minded people, it's hard to come up with arguments that challenge the group consensus, which means group members keep hearing arguments only in one direction.”

The general lack of awareness of the internet echo chamber has intensified its impact. Since the majority of viewpoints readers see online are similar to their own, they tend to think their beliefs are more universal than they really are.

To combat this effect, attentive readers often search for less biased

sources to verify what they read. New Trier math teacher Sasha Fajenstein described her effort to balance her preferred sources with others that are seen as more reliable.

“My parents always listened to CNN on the radio, so that's what I've always read,” she said. “I know a lot of people say CNN is a little bit left-leaning, so my husband told me to read The Hill. He said it's the newspaper that most people in Congress read.”

She expressed that reading The Hill offers some contrast to her usual material. “The Hill is a little right-leaning, so I feel like it balances out the other things I read,” she said.

Senior Julia Zimmer didn't see as much of a problem with reading opinions that she agrees with, as long as she has more moderate sources to verify the information.

“I'm liberal, and I typically read CNN, The Wall Street Journal, and The New York Times. I've never watched FOX News, nor will I ever watch it,” she said.

Zimmer saw the media's bias as the primary cause of one-sided news. “I think people should always hear multiple perspectives,” she said. “News should just be news, not opinion.”

## Buzzfeed popular among youth despite superficiality

The availability and ease of BuzzFeed enables viewers to get a snip clip of news

by Lindsey Burns

Not long ago, most high school students would get their news from print newspapers and network TV. Now, the news world has changed because of the internet.

More and more, people are getting their news through apps such as BuzzFeed. Our current generation has different habits that involve smart phones and computers.

We pick and choose content with a touch of a button and rarely take the time to glance at the news. We rely on flashy graphics and snippets of text to get our attention.

One of the most prominent apps in the media world is BuzzFeed, an internet company that combines social news and entertainment.

*“[Y]ou can inform yourself on news topics but also play really fun quizzes like ‘We can guess your favorite TV show’”*

Buzzfeed is one of several apps that attract a big audience and has changed the way people get their news.

“It's a good news source,” said junior Graham Rodes. “There are definitely more credible news sources, yet I feel like it's easier to read and understand compared to larger publications like New York Times or Chicago Sun-Times.”

The experience is much more convenient than reading a newspaper, students say.

“I go on BuzzFeed because it's on my Snapchat feed and I can quickly go on it to see interesting

and, most of the time, stupid stories,” senior Avery Schuldt said. “It's convenient because I can get my ‘news’ fast.”

Like Schuldt, many students agree that BuzzFeed is easy to access because devices are always present.

Junior Emma Olson said the app is so convenient that she uses it in her free time. “I have the BuzzFeed app and on snapchat I use the BuzzFeed feature. I use it when I'm bored.”

The news may not be all that relevant and reliable, so some people use it purely for entertainment. The quizzes offered by BuzzFeed can be a fun outlet but not serious.

Rodes does not consider BuzzFeed a viable source but he uses it for enjoyment.

“It's a really fun app, because you can inform yourself on news topics but also play really fun quizzes like ‘We can guess your favorite TV show’ or ‘What is your celeb soulmate?’”

Olson agrees that BuzzFeed is more entertaining than informative. “I like how there are a lot of different quizzes,” she said. “You can search for any quiz, for example if you want to know what personality you are, or if you're a Cubs fan.”

None of the students interviewed thought BuzzFeed transformed news more than any other popular news app.

“I don't think BuzzFeed has transformed news more than other popular news apps because in my experience I haven't seen BuzzFeed deal with real news,” said senior Ryan McGuinness. “From my experience, they seem more like tabloids than news.”

McGuinness is not alone in saying that BuzzFeed lacks depth and veracity.

“I don't really use it for real news,” said Schuldt. “I don't consider it a reliable news source but I do think it is changing the news world. It's making news easier to get and more readily available.”