

# Fake News

**Fake news websites** (also referred to as **hoax news websites**) are Internet websites that deliberately publish fake news—hoaxes, propaganda, and disinformation purporting to be real news—often using social media to drive web traffic and amplify their effect. Unlike news satire, fake news websites deliberately seek to be perceived as legitimate and taken at face value, often for financial or political gain. Such sites have promoted political falsehoods in Germany, Indonesia and the Philippines, Sweden, Myanmar, and the United States. Many sites originate in, or are promoted by, Russia, North Macedonia, Romania, and some individuals in the United States.

**Fake news**, also known as **junk news** or **pseudo-news**, is a type of yellow journalism or propaganda that consists of deliberate disinformation or hoaxes spread via traditional news media (print and broadcast) or online social media. The false information is often caused by reporters paying sources for stories, an unethical practice called checkbook journalism. Digital news has brought back and increased the usage of fake news, or yellow journalism. The news is then often reverberated as misinformation in social media but occasionally finds its way to the mainstream media as well.



Fake news is written and published usually with the intent to mislead in order to damage an agency, entity, or person, and/or gain financially or politically, often using sensationalist, dishonest, or outright fabricated headlines to increase readership. Similarly, clickbait stories and headlines earn advertising revenue from this activity.

The relevance of fake news has increased in post-truth politics. For media outlets, the ability to attract viewers to their websites is necessary to generate online advertising revenue. Publishing a story with false content that attracts users benefits advertisers and improves ratings. Easy access to online advertisement revenue, increased political polarization, and the popularity of social media, primarily the Facebook News Feed, have all been implicated in the spread of fake news, which competes with legitimate news stories. Hostile government actors have also been implicated in generating and propagating fake news, particularly during elections.

Fake news undermines serious media coverage and makes it more difficult for journalists to cover significant news stories. An analysis by BuzzFeed found that the top 20 fake news stories about the 2016 U.S. presidential election received more engagement on Facebook than the top 20 election stories from 19 major media outlets. Anonymously-hosted fake news websites lacking known publishers have also been criticized, because they make it difficult to prosecute sources of fake news for libel.

The term is also at times used to cast doubt upon legitimate news from an opposing political standpoint, a tactic known as the lying press. During and after his presidential campaign and election, Donald Trump popularized the term "fake news" in this sense when he used it to describe the negative press coverage of himself. In part as a result of Trump's use of the term, the term has come under increasing criticism, and in October 2018 the British government decided that it will no longer use the term because it is "a poorly-defined and misleading term that conflates a variety of false information, from genuine error through to foreign interference in democratic processes.

## Definition

*Fake news* is a neologism often used to refer to fabricated news. This type of news, found in traditional news, social media or fake news websites, has no basis in fact, but is presented as being factually accurate.

Michael Radutzky, a producer of CBS *60 Minutes*, said his show considers fake news to be "stories that are probably false, have enormous traction [popular appeal] in the culture, and are consumed by millions of people." These stories are not only

found in politics, but also in areas like vaccination, stock values and nutrition. He did not include news that is "invoked by politicians against the media for stories that they don't like or for comments that they don't like" as fake news. Guy Campanile, also a *60 Minutes* producer said, "What we are talking about are stories that are fabricated out of thin air. By most measures, deliberately, and by any definition, that's a lie."

The intent and purpose of fake news is important. In some cases, what appears to be fake news may be news satire, which uses exaggeration and introduces non-factual elements that are intended to amuse or make a point, rather than to deceive. Propaganda can also be fake news. Some researchers have highlighted that "fake news" may be distinguished not just by the falsity of its content, but also the "character of [its] online circulation and reception".

Claire Wardle of *First Draft News* identifies seven types of fake news:

1. satire or parody ("no intention to cause harm but has potential to fool")
2. false connection ("when headlines, visuals or captions don't support the content")
3. misleading content ("misleading use of information to frame an issue or an individual")
4. false context ("when genuine content is shared with false contextual information")
5. impostor content ("when genuine sources are impersonated" with false, made-up sources)
6. manipulated content ("when genuine information or imagery is manipulated to deceive", as with a "doctored" photo)
7. fabricated content ("new content is 100% false, designed to deceive and do harm")

In the context of the United States of America and its election processes in the 2010s, fake news generated considerable controversy and argument, with some commentators defining concern over it as moral panic or mass hysteria and others worried about damage done to public trust.

In January 2017, the United Kingdom House of Commons commenced a parliamentary inquiry into the "growing phenomenon of fake news".

Some, most notably United States President Donald Trump, have broadened the meaning of "fake news" to include news that was negative of his presidency.

In November 2017, Claire Wardle (mentioned above) announced she has rejected the phrase "fake news" and "censors it in conversation", finding it "woefully inadequate" to describe the issues. She now speaks of "information pollution" and distinguishes between three types of problems: 'mis-information', 'dis-information', and 'mal-information':

1. Mis-information: false information disseminated without harmful intent.
2. Dis-information: created and shared by people with harmful intent.
3. Mal-information: the sharing of "genuine" information with the intent to cause harm.

Author Terry Pratchett, who had a background as a journalist and press officer, was among the first to be concerned about the spread of fake news on the Internet. In a 1995 interview with Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft, he said "Let's say I call myself the Institute for Something-or-other and I decide to promote a spurious treatise saying the Jews were entirely responsible for the second world war and the Holocaust didn't happen, and it goes out there on the Internet and is available on the same terms as any piece of historical research which has undergone peer review and so on. There's a kind of parity of esteem of information on the net. It's all there: there's no way of finding out whether this stuff has any bottom to it or whether someone has just made it up". Gates was optimistic and disagreed, saying that authorities on the Net would index and check facts and reputations in a much more sophisticated way than in print. But it was Pratchett who had "accurately predicted how the internet would propagate and legitimise fake news".

## Types of fake news

Here are a few examples of fake news and how they are viewed:

- Clickbait
- Propaganda

- Satire/parody
- Sloppy journalism
- Misleading headings
- Biased or slanted news

These are features of fake news and may help to identify and avoid instances of fake news.



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