

# Fake News: A New Trending Phenomenon and Challenges

\*Ashish Sharma

*Assistant Professor-II  
Amity School of communication  
Amity University*

## Abstract

*As we know news is a piece of information which we get through various forms of communication. In the beginning we have Traditional media like newspaper and Television through which we were getting news. After that through internet and nowadays through social media we were getting news. Earlier we believed that whatever information is communicated or conveyed through various medium of communication is real and we believed that, but with the advent of fake news on social media now it's become difficult to believe which is real and which is not. Fake news has many synonyms like disinformation campaigns, cyber propaganda, cognitive hacking, and information warfare. It also makes it easier to manipulate the people's perception of reality and thought processes, resulting in the proliferation of fake news that affects our real, non-digital environment. Nowadays social media is a dominant source of information for significant parts of our societies. There are numerous positive aspects of these media, such as their ability to mobilize for a political cause or to make any public opinion. Today no one can deny that social media strengthen free speech in general, allow greater and quicker flows of ideas across societies, and add to the quality of life. Yet at the same time, social media may sometimes negatively impact the public debate. This paper analyses how social media activist spread fake news and manipulate public opinion to serve various motives like political or personal. We will also try to discuss about the fake news triangle. Through this research paper we will also try to find out how this problem of fake news can be countered by social media platform and general public.*

**Keywords:** - Fake news, Fake news Triangle, Fake News Types, challenges

## Introduction

Fake news is the promotion and propagation of news articles via social media. These articles are promoted in such a way that they appear to be spread by other users, as opposed to being paid-for advertising. The news stories distributed are designed to influence or manipulate users' opinions on a certain topic towards certain objectives.

According to Forrest Stroud Fake news, or hoax news, refers to false information or propaganda published under the guise of being authentic news. Fake news websites and channels push their fake news content in an attempt to mislead consumers of the content and spread misinformation via social networks and word-of-mouth.

One of the more colorful definitions of fake news comes from PolitiFact: "Fake news is made-up stuff, masterfully manipulated to look like credible journalistic reports that are easily spread online to large audiences willing to believe the fictions and spread the word." The spread of fake news is such that even seasoned politicians are falling prey to it and quoting it on television channels. It is assumed that fake news is an outcome of the increasing presence of social media.

## Definition of the phenomenon

The sharing of fake news on social media is deliberate, undertaken by an organisation or an individual, with the aim of fabricating and disseminating information that is fully or partially false in nature in order to influence opinion or stir controversy, or for financial gain. Fake news often includes a grain of truth, but this 'kernel of true information'

is twisted, taken out of context, surrounded by false details and so on. In many cases, fake news is dressed up to look like a genuine news item, sometimes from a pretend news outlet. Some fake news sources imitate trustworthy, independent institutions. Not all fake news authors aim to make people change their minds. Sometimes the goal is to polarise society.

Fake news must be distinguished from satirical content: making up absurd details and claims does not meet the definition of satire. Online fake news gains traction when it is shared massively on Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and/or WhatsApp, or is promoted by Google's search algorithms. This is how such items infiltrate the political debate. One of the best known examples of fake news was the story attributed to the 'Denver Guardian' (no such newspaper exists), which claimed that the FBI agent suspected of leaking the emails from Hillary Clinton during the 2016 US election campaign had been found dead, murdered in a way that made it look like suicide. At one point this item was being share on Facebook at one hundred times per minute, generating hundreds of thousands of views.

Similarly, in India a massive fake news industry has sprung up exercising influence over traditional discourse of politics and has a potential in becoming a security challenge like the Arab Spring if not kept in check. As the debate over mob lynching in India is raging it should be understood that such incidents would not have had such a rapid and massive effect if the youth had not had access to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other social media that allowed the fake news industry to organise and share made-up videos and information. The mob lynching since the past years are a direct result of the fake news industry spilling over from social media to the real world.

Fake News was used very effectively during US Presidential elections. It was part of the official campaign itself run in collaboration with tech companies and it is also being alleged that even the Russians also ran their own network. The same method was used to shape the Brexit debate as well. As we write this the fake news industry is spreading its tentacles in India as well. Many of India's leading sportsmen, celebrities, economists, politicians have already fallen victim to this by disseminating such fake content. This is a dangerous trend and should be kept in check by our intelligence agencies to avert future disaster.

## **The history of fake news**

The spread of fake news is such that even seasoned politicians are falling prey to it and quoting it on television channels. It is assumed that fake news is an outcome of the increasing presence of social media. One of the first major instances of fake news was in 1835, when *New York Sun* published a story on creatures that were residing on the moon. The *Sun* claimed that the famous astronomer John Herschel had built a powerful telescope through which he observed giant men walking on the moon, a temple that was made of polished sapphire and so on. Needless to say, the sales of *New York Sun* shot up. But the truth was that it was a fake news concocted by the editor of the *Sun*, Richard Adams Locke. Yes, the astronomer John Herschel was working in South Africa on astronomical observations but the results were months away. Locke thought instead of waiting for the results he could circulate fake news to create a sensation-which he did.

Even before this, in the 16th and 17th century, when means of communication were fewer and not so effective fake news would make rounds through pamphlets. Some would speak of strange creatures that have been discovered or of superhuman beings. The printers saw nothing wrong in this. During the Second World War, President Roosevelt himself resorted to use of fake news (may be unknowingly) to whip up American frenzy against Hitler. He claimed to have got his hands on a secret document of the Nazis which clearly indicated their designs on America. The truth was this document had been created by the British Intelligence agencies to ensure that America also joined in the war. In today's times, one of the main carriers of fake news is the social media, though other form of media - print and visual - are also responsible for endorsing and spreading fake news.

"The purpose of fake news is not to pose an alternative truth. But to destroy truth altogether, to set us adrift in a world of belief without facts, a world where there is no defense against lies." Actually, the purpose of fake news isn't to destroy truth; it is to manipulate, to weaponize information, made out of whole cloth at times, to achieve political or societal goals" (Gioe,2017).

We have seen the impact of fake news in misleading people, spreading false propaganda or maligning people and communities. Fake news also has a commercial aspect as we saw in the example of the *Sun*. Therefore, commissioning and spreading fake news is just a means to an objective. In India, fake news based on fabricated and non-existing facts especially on social media has been instrumental in instigating communal violence. Moreover, the rise in the volume of fake news aimed at hate mongering in the last few years has increased the probability of creating communal hatred and instigating violence. This brief is an attempt to describe misuse of social media to create communal disharmony and policy framework available for addressing these challenges. Although the term gained notoriety during the 2016 US presidential election campaign, the phenomenon as such is much older: it is as old as mass communication. Purposely written, false stories— for instance, Procopius’ *Anecdota*—existed in the Roman Empire and were abundant in eighteenth century France and England. Partly or fully false stories also played an important part in the success of Joseph Pulitzer’s and William Hearst’s ‘yellow press’ at the end of the nineteenth century. In the 1930s the League of Nations carried out research into how to combat ‘false news’ most effectively. While versions of fake news have thus long been present in society, the fake news that exists in the realm of online social media is not least because of the speed at which it can be propagated and the reach it can attain.

### Fake news Triangle

While fake news campaigns are executed slightly differently on each media, in the context of social media and the internet these campaigns rely on three different components to be successful. In Fake news triangle the first requirement is tools and services which is used for manipulating and spreading the information around the relevant social media networks. Nowadays a wide variety of tools and services are available in the social media where some are relatively simple (paid likes/followers, etc.), while some are more unusual—some services promise to stuff online polls, while some force site owners to take down stories. Tools and services for social media promotion are readily available, both inside and outside the underground scene.

Second important element of Fake news triangle is Social platform. To use these tools and services we need a social platform, which can be used as a platform for spreading propaganda. With people spending more time on these sites as a way to get the latest news and information, their importance in spreading fake news cannot be underestimated.

Finally, the third and most important element is motivation .So that we can understand the real motive behind the propaganda campaign or fake news. In some cases it’s simply a desire for monetary gain via advertising. In other cases, the goals can vary from the criminal to the political. Regardless of the motive, the success of any propaganda campaign will ultimately be based on how much it affects the real world



**Fake news Triangle**

## Classification of Fake News:-

**Genuine News:** - Truthful reporting in digital journalism is abundant in well established print or radio “legacy journalism” outlets (e.g., www.nytimes.com, www.bbc.co.uk, www.cbc.ca) or reputable citizen journalist blogs with an established reputation. Such sources can be considered genuine unless proven otherwise, retracted or corrected, but may require permissions or costs for R&D use. Predictive features of veracity may vary by genres and topics, and thus should be kept consistent from truthful to deceptive news. Finger-pointing In political events, territorial conflicts, wars or other current controversies, news channels or individual reporters may be accused of partisanship, blindness, or straight out lies. Such situations do not meet the intentional lying criterion, since reporting is likely to be consistent with the reporter’s beliefs, worldview, biases, or affiliations. The Israeli Palestinian or Russian-Ukrainian conflicts are readily offered up as candidates for news verification data, but they lack clear unbiased determination of the “ground truth”.

**Deceptive News:** - Deceptive news can be harvested, crowd sourced, or mimicked by qualified study participants. An elicited dataset can be tailored to the above-mentioned nine requirements, but the “ground truth” verification mechanism needs to be built into the data collection process.

Below we discuss the three types of fake news, each in contrast to genuine serious reporting, suggesting that there are at least three distinct sub-tasks in fake news detection:

a) Fabrication

b) Hoaxing

c) Satire detection

- a. **Fabrication or fraudulent reporting** is not unheard of in both old and new media. Exposed fraudulent journalistic writing, discussed in Compton & Benedetti (2015) or Shingler), are ideal for a fake news corpus. It is time-consuming and tedious to collect original copies of uncovered fabricated news; and resulting corpora may be limited in size for NLP. Yellow press and tabloids present a wide spectrum of unverified news and uses eye-catching headlines (“clickbaits”), exaggerations, scandal-mongering, or sensationalism to increase traffic or profits (Yellow Journalism, 2015). Tabloids specifically emphasize topics such as sensational crime stories, astrology, gossip columns about celebrities, and junk food news (Tabloids, 2015). Yellow journalism is a suitable source for fake news corpus in cases of obvious or exposed falsification, fabrication, or exaggeration, and may require investigation.
- b. **Hoaxing** is another type of deliberate fabrication or falsification in the mainstream or social media. Attempts to deceive audiences masquerade as news, and may be picked up and mistakenly validated by traditional news outlets. Brunvand (1998) distinguishes a hoax from pranking or practical joking as “relatively complex and large-scale fabrications” which may include deceptions that go beyond the merely playful and “cause material loss or harm to the victim” (p. 875). The #Columbian Chemical plant hoax is an example of a harmful multi-platform attack (Chen, 2015) with an identifiable communication pattern (Matt, 2015). We distinguish serious fabricated news from humorous ones. If readers are aware of the humorous intent, they may no longer be predisposed to take the information at face value. Technology can identify humor and prominently display originating sources (e.g., The Onion) to alert users, especially in decontextualized news aggregators/platforms.
- c. **News Satire News** satire sites, news parody, a.k.a. literally fake news (e.g., The Onion and CBC’s This is That) is one specific genre with numerous sites that present news “in a format typical of mainstream journalism but rely heavily on irony and deadpan humor to emulate a genuine news source, mimicking credible news sources and stories, and often achieving wide distribution” (News Satire, 2015).

## Top fake news in India

Here is the list of top fake news in India in 2016 as per Indiatoday.in

- I. **UNESCO declares "Jana Gana Mana" best national anthem:-** Another favourite Indian rumour involving UNESCO is the claim that India's national anthem -- "Jana Gana Mana" -- has been declared the

"Best National Anthem In The World". The fake news started in 2008 through email and then caught the UN agency's attention.

- II. **UNESCO declares PM Modi best Prime Minister:** - UNESCO has been one of the primary alleged sources of fake news in India. In June 2016, fake news broke out on WhatsApp groups, and other social media, that the UN cultural agency had awarded Prime Minister Narendra Modi the title of best prime minister in the world.
- III. **UNESCO declares new Rs 2,000 note best currency in the world :-** Another fake UNESCO certificate for India touched upon the notebandi crisis, as messages claimed the organisation had certified the new Rs 2,000 note as the "best currency in the world". The message, shared widely on WhatsApp, claimed "Dr Saurabh Mukherjee, head of cultural awareness department of UNESCO announced this to media"
- IV. **New notes have a GPS chip to detect black money:-** Another notebandi rumour proliferated when PM Modi announced the withdrawal of old Rs 1,000 and Rs 500 notes on November 8, 2016. In less than an hour, rumours circulating on WhatsApp of a nano geo-positioning system (GPS) tracking device embedded in the new Rs 2,000 notes gained traction. This chip, the messages said, would alert authorities if black money was hoarded. The nano-GPS chip does not need any power source, the forward said, according to a Firstpost report.
- V. **New notes have radioactive ink:** - Notebandi provided more fodder for fake news. Earlier this month, rumours began circulating that the RBI was using radioactive ink to print new Rs 2,000 and Rs 500 notes. The new notes include a "radioactive isotope of phosphorous (P32), which has 15 protons and 17 neutrons".
- VI. **WhatsApp profile pictures can be used by ISIS for terror activities:-** A WhatsApp forward, supposedly sent by the Delhi police commissioner, requested "moms" and "sisters" to delete their WhatsApp profile pictures for security purposes. These pictures were supposedly vulnerable to misuse by the terror group Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), whose hackers had access to citizens' details and could easily steal their virtual identity, according to the forwarded message. The message further claimed that WhatsApp's CEO had requested users do this for 20-25 days, while their team worked on enhancing the messaging application's security features.
- VII. **RBI declares the Rs 10 coin invalid:-** Months before notebandi was announced, the message that the RBI had declared the Rs 10 coin invalid spread through WhatsApp, particularly to areas in Agra, Delhi and Meerut. This confusion led shopkeepers, kiosk-owners, auto-rickshaw drivers and vendors to refuse the coins, according to a Hindustan Times report from September 2016.
- VIII. **Salt shortage in India:-** WhatsApp messages of a salt shortage (despite a 7,517 km coastline) in November 2016 triggered panic buying at markets past midnight, and caused a four-fold price-rise in some parts of the country. Western Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Maharashtra and Hyderabad were particularly affected by this bit of fake news, said news reports. The subsequent chaos to stock up on the essential commodity led to the death of a woman in Kanpur, while police baton-charged crowds and stopped mobs from looting grocery shops, according to an India Today report.
- IX. **"Nehru Govt has stood like a Banyan Tree": Mark Tully:-** Fake news claiming former BBC India bureau chief Mark Tully called for support to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, while describing India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru's government as standing "like a banyan tree, overshadowing the people and the institutions of India", went viral on social media earlier this month.

## How to counter fake news problem

- I. **Be sceptical of headlines.** The headlines of fake news stories are often catchy, and contain lots of capital letters and exclamation marks. If claims in the headline sound unbelievable, they may well be.



- II. **Look closely at the URL.** Many false news stories mimic authentic news sources by making small changes to the URL. You can go to the site to compare the URL to established sources.
- III. **Check the source.** Ensure the story comes from a source with a reputation for accuracy. If the story comes from a site you have not heard of, check their “About” section to learn more.
- IV. **Watch for unusual formatting.** Many false news stories often contain spelling and grammar errors, as well as an awkward looking layout.
- V. **Check the photos.** False news stories often contain manipulated images or videos. Sometimes the photo may be authentic, but taken out of context. You can do an internet search of the image to find out where it came from.
- VI. **Check the dates.** Fake news stories may contain timelines that make no sense, or event dates which are wrong or have been altered.
- VII. **Check the evidence.** Check the author’s sources to confirm they are accurate. Lack of evidence, or a reliance on unnamed experts may indicate false news.
- VIII. **Look at other reports.** If no other news source is reporting the same story, it could indicate that it is false.
- IX. **Is the story a joke?** Sometimes false news stories can be hard to distinguish from humorous articles. Check whether the source is known for parody, and whether the story’s details and tone suggest it may be just for fun.
- X. **Some stories are intentionally false.** Think critically about the stories that you read, and only share articles which you know to be credible.

## Conclusion

The advancement of information technology in last few decades has brought in radical changes in our life. It has helped individuals to grow and progress on the one hand and facilitated system of governance that is more transparent, reliable, accessible, fair and efficient on the other. Amongst innumerable advantages of information technology, what has been truly path breaking is that it allows people to share their ideas with a wide global audience in an instant. This technological advancement has not only broken monopoly of traditional media houses to produce content but also broken all types of barriers in creating and disseminating one’s own content/write-ups. However, as with any other technological advancement, it brings with it certain short comings. While we are able to get updates of events almost as it happens, it is also true that it has also lead to fake and false news spreading like wild fire creating a rift between various communities, caste, race and religion by spreading lies. Multi cultural countries like India have witnessed several incidents of communal violence instigated by lies propagated by religious fundamentalists for political gain. Political battles are now being fought over in the social media. Not only fringe elements, but mainstream political parties and government run by them are in forefront of using fake news for various purposes. The repeated attempts to win arguments by using fake information by political parties, their leaders and government shows that there is a conscious effort to mislead people.

Indian government has pro-actively embraced the advantages of advancement in information technology to serve its people better. However, its efforts to minimize misuse of technology and cyber crime remain ineffective. The IT Act, 2000 even after several amendments in 2008 has been unable to tackle the menace of fake news through social media. This law does not criminalize creation and spread of fake news on cyber space. Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, *Whats App*, and Instagram have been widely misused to spread fake news, lies and propaganda in India. Despite this, all these platforms have no accountability under the IT Act, 2000 to filter unlawful messages posted by their users. Using this gray area available in cyber space, hate mongering people/groups with vested political interest have been instigating communal hatred and violence. The Union government has itself acknowledged several times in the past that the hate mongering propaganda on social media plays a key role in instigating communal hatred, violence apart from spreading false stories about political opponents. While this is not a completely new phenomena, various observations of experts reveals that the presence of fake news has increased tremendously in last 3-4 years. What is more worrying is that those involved in the industry of fake news enjoy political patronage. Moreover, there is a high demand of fake news from these political bosses to justify their opportunistic and dishonest politics. Fake news producing portals and individuals have been supplying lies and misinformation not only to political propagandists but also ministers and their subordinates to present a false picture of their achievement as leader and as government. While social media platforms are today an integral part of our lives, we also need to regulate these platforms to stop spread of fake news, lies and false propaganda.

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