Overcoming the Challenge of Fake News

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Abstract

The advent of the Internet and the Information Age was initially hailed as ushering in a new era of transparency and interconnectivity in binding the world closer together. Yet, the Information Age has also brought a proliferation in the phenomenon known as fake news, a trend that is set to continue for the foreseeable future. In this, the potential impact of fake news on international relations should not be underestimated, particularly given the extent to which the phenomenon has been exploited by various entities, from political ideologues and political partisans to government espionage agencies, to skew the media narrative. This article will examine what fake news is and the challenge that it poses to civil society, before moving on to discuss the various types of fake news that have begun to emerge in recent years. Based on this discussion of the threats posed by the fake news phenomenon, this article will conclude by examining how educators, civil society and other stakeholders may respond to the challenges posed by fake news.

Introduction

Although the phenomenon of fake news is not new,[1] the advent of the Information Age and the Internet has led to its proliferation on an order of magnitude. More significantly, the extent to which distorted media narratives arguably tilted the 2016 US Presidential Elections in favour of Donald Trump stand as a reflection of how a failure to maintain a centrist media narrative can have far-reaching consequences for international relations. The importance of an inquiry into the subject of fake news and its implications is further accentuated by the author's experience as a mid-career university educator that has seen increasing numbers of university students turning to the use of the Internet as an inexpensive, yet highly convenient, means of undertaking research in the social sciences. Whilst the author acknowledges the extent to which Internet sources are an important and effective means of data collection, he also emphasises that the proliferation of agenda-driven websites and purveyors of conspiracy theories underscores the necessity of sensitivity to the threats posed by fake news to civil society and caution in utilising the Internet for data collection.

This analysis shall be outlined in the following three sections, beginning with an effort to separate facts from analysis and why this distinction is important. In so doing, this section shall lay down the groundwork for identifying the online opportunities available for exploitation by purveyors of fake news. A second section examines in more detail how and why the advent of fake news poses a threat to civil society and democratic political institutions. The third section shall conclude this article by examining how civil society, educators and other stakeholders can address the challenges posed by fake news.

Separating Facts from Analysis

Facts are derived from the Latin term *factum*, denoting something that has been done. In the period since the Enlightenment, facts have increasingly been understood to refer to something that has actually occurred (as a past fact), something that has an actual existence (in the present tense), or a phenomenon whose proof is derived from an objective reality. Facts can be seen as empirically provable data, such as statistics, historical events, quotes and documentary evidence, such as diaries, memoirs and government statements. In this sense, the importance of facts and data is underscored by its criticality as the "raw material" with which observers engage in analysis of facts – in the overwhelming majority of various fields of study, it is difficult to imagine a situation in which an observer can engage in meaningful analysis without using facts as a starting point of analysis. At the same time, however, whilst there is a certain allure for facts that speak for themselves to reveal a self-evident truth, such a situation is not only tautological, but also runs contrary to the spirit of intellectual inquiry. Facts do not speak themselves – were this the case, the process of social science inquiry would be reduced to a sequence of using Google to find data that is copied and pasted. Needless to say, such an approach is unprofessional, demeans the intellectual dignity of the observer involved, and fails to make a meaningful, value-added contribution to the subject being studied. There are simply too many facts that may be relevant (directly or indirectly) to

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[1] As an early example after the advent of print media during the Industrial Revolution, in 1835, the *New York Sun* published a series of articles that falsely claimed that the astronomer Sir John Herschel had, with the aid of a newly designed telescope, observed strange fauna on the surface on the moon, including unicorns and bat-winged humanoid creatures. See Stephanie Hall (2014). Belief, Legend, and the Great Moon Hoax. *Library of Congress.* https://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/2014/08/the-great-moon-hoax/.

a given phenomenon under study. To illustrate the limitations of presenting facts as truth, a brief hypothetical example of a university student is used here.

In writing up an essay for his final exam on US foreign policy (as an example), the student may be tempted to turn to Google, copying and pasting material from the Internet as a short-cut solution to submit an essay before a fast approaching deadline. Such an approach is, however, bound to backfire on the student, given the sheer quantity of news articles, academic journal articles, analytical commentaries, media interviews and other sources of data. To this mix of information available on the Internet (which may or may not be accurate), the problem of fake news sites, such as purveyors of conspiracy theories and satirical websites, further reflects the perils of taking online sources at face value. Nor is the use of Wikipedia acceptable for such a student, given the ease with which Wikipedia pages can be edited by anyone – including Internet trolls with a particular axe to grind. Under such circumstances, the student in our hypothetical example is apt to submit a final exam paper based on a mish-mash of raw data pieced together without any meaningful analysis, lacking any intellectual coherence, is analytically superficial, and which fails to add any value to the student's grasp of US foreign policy. The result is that the student in question, even if his essay were to pass scrutiny by the convener for his course, will complete his university degree and graduates without the ability to draw independent analytical conclusions. Thus, as the late futurist and author Alvin Toffler noted, "the illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn". (Toffler,1970, p. 414) Such a person's ability to offer a meaningful value-added contribution to the knowledge is extremely limited and belies the underlying purpose of a university education in developing and refining the human skills of analysis. In short, facts do not speak for themselves; rather, they must be evaluated, critiqued, reviewed and analysed to have any meaning to a relevant audience.

Seen in this light, if facts constitute the raw data through which observers attempt to understand their world, analysis can be seen as the process through which raw data is evaluated for the purpose of drawing out conclusions for the wider audience. Although analysis and opinion overlap with facts, it is necessary to emphasise the differences therein. Analysis is an appraisal of given facts, and is reflected in a person undertaking cause and effect analysis in evaluating facts to express an opinion on a given subject. The conclusion of an effort at analysis is derived from a person's review of the facts that are available to him or her. In this sense, whilst it may be more appropriate to view facts as an ontological issue ("what is knowledge"), analysis may be seen as reflecting epistemology ("how do we acquire knowledge"). Such distinction is made evident in the taxonomy of learning that was outlined by Benjamin Bloom's work during the late 1940s and 1950s. Bloom's taxonomy was notable for drawing a distinction between lower-level learning outcomes such as knowledge and understanding, on the one hand, and higher-level learning outcomes, such as applying acquired knowledge, analysing the implications of such knowledge, synthesising different components of the process of analysis, critical evaluation and the ability to create new knowledge on the other. In this sense, these higher-level outcomes represent the ultimate objective of the learning and educational process – the ability to apply, analyse and review factual data for the purpose of creating new knowledge. Whilst such analysis cannot realistically be undertaken when there is a dearth of facts, it is even more important for educators and scholars alike to bear in mind that facts, in their own right, do not constitute analysis.
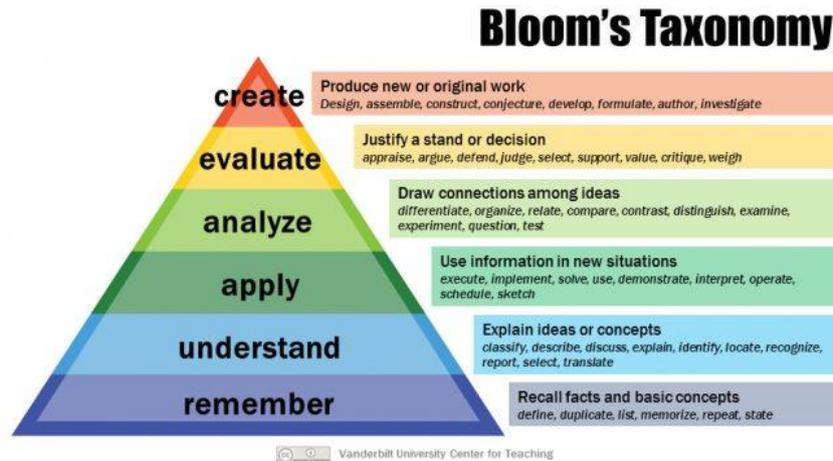
Figure 1: Bloom's Taxonomy (source: Armstrong, P. (2001). *Bloom's Taxonomy* Vanderbilt University. Revised edition, Retrieved from https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/).

The importance of this distinction is highlighted if we return to our hypothetical example of a student working to submit an essay assignment. Rather than succumbing to the temptation of a shortcut offered by copying and pasting from the Internet, the student instead engages in source triangulation – a process of inquiry in which data and analytical perspectives from a range of different sources is sought. The effective use of source triangulation thus allows data to be gathered from a range of reputable online sources (such as newspapers and research think-tanks) as well as published books and journal articles from his university library. In addition, acknowledging that data is not particularly useful without analysis, the student who triangulates can evaluate the meaning of the data that he has collected, ensuring the employment of cause-and-effect analysis in linking the facts that he has collected to the conclusions that he has reached in his essay assignment. Although such an end-result is more painstaking and requires more effort than a simple copy-and-paste exercise, the result is that the student completes his degree program more capable (and therefore confident) in his own ability to gather information, to critique and analyse facts in-depth, and to be self-reliant as an independent learner. Such a graduate is all the more ready to take on the challenges of the workplace. The distinction between facts and analysis is evident based on the following table.

	Ontological	Epistemological
Type of knowledge	Facts	Analysis
Implications for research in social sciences	What is knowledge?	Theory of knowledge: how do we acquire knowledge
Examples	i) Primary documents, diaries and memoirs ii) Quotes iii) Statistical data iv) Historical relics	i) Debates concerning the origin of the Nazi Holocaust ii) Is the denuclearisation of North Korea possible?
Its necessity to social science inquiry	Data as the "raw material"' for undertaking analysis	Analysis of facts as the "value-added" characteristic of human analysis of social science.

Table 1. The Distinction between Facts and Analysis

Ontologically, it is possible to see how factual inaccuracy may result from a careless recording of an event, or due to the actions of an observer who was acting without the benefit of hindsight. As an example, during the 1948 US elections, the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, a pro-Republican newspaper, was so confident that Republican candidate Thomas Dewey would defeat President Truman that they published their headline on November 3 as "Dewey Defeats Truman" (Cosgrove, 2014).

That said, it should be emphasised that such an instance can in no way be described as a deliberate attempt to mislead the general public through fake news. Whilst the editorial staff of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* may have been carried away by pro-Dewey enthusiasm, their erroneous reporting was not in any way a deliberate attempt to misinform the general public. As the following section indicates, however, the advent of the Internet and the Information Age has created virtually limitless opportunities for purveyors of fake news to deliberately distort the general public's understanding of world events.

The Threat of Fake News

As the academic study of fake news is still in its infancy, it is unclear precisely how many different variants of the phenomenon may come to shape media narratives in the 21st century. Nonetheless, based on a brief reading of the history of print media since the 20th century, and more so in the Information Age, it is possible to identify the following seven forms of fake news (some of which overlap with one another) that stakeholders must be on guard for in the Information Age.

Threat 1: Deliberate forgeries
An early form of deliberate factual inaccuracy predates the Internet, with two notable instances occurring during the 20th century. During the late 1970s, Konrad Kujau, an East German who had fled to West Germany and made a living through petty crime, released the "Hitler Diaries", a set of manuscripts that he proclaimed to be the long-lost memoirs of the Nazi leader. Although a hoax, the level of realism and detail that went into the Hitler Diaries was sufficient to convince the distinguished British historian, Hugh Trevor-Roper, of their

authenticity. Although Kujau was driven by pecuniary objectives rather than political ones, the subsequent revelation that the Hitler diaries were forged inflicted significant damage on Trevor-Roper's academic credentials.

A rather more insidious instance of the deliberate forgery of documents occurred earlier, in 1903, when the Tsarist Okhrana secret police released the so-called "Protocol of the Elders of Zion". The Protocol was pieced together from various anti-Semitic texts to claim the existence of a global Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world, and released as a pretext to justify the Tsar's anti-Jewish pogroms. It is notable that the document had impacts that reached far beyond Russia's borders and long after the Tsar was deposed. From 1920 to 1922, the American industrialist Henry Ford sponsored the publication of some 500,000 copies of the Protocol (Ford, 1920s).

In 1930s Germany, amidst severe unemployment and the general disillusionment of society amidst the Great Depression, the Nazi Party found the Protocol as a useful means of redirecting internal nationalist anger towards Jewish communities as a scapegoat for Germany's socio-economic ills (Bytwerk, 2015). In so doing, the Nazis' willingness to adopt a well-publicised instance of fake news to tap into latent anti-Semitism in 1930s Germany contributed to an incremental rise in ultra-nationalism. Within such a highly-charged socio-political environment, there was little to stop the passing of the Nuremberg Laws or the Nazi Holocaust, during which an estimated six million Jews perished. Yet, even though the Protocol of the Elders of Zion has been conclusively proven to be a forgery, the existence of this document continues to be cited in the present day by various anti-Semitic entities as justification for their hostility against the state of Israel, as well as anti-Semitic violence in general (Anti-Defamation League, 2002).

Threat 2: Cherry-picking the facts
A further means through which fake news may enter into the media narrative arises when commentators on a given event deliberately engage in the selective use of facts. Such selectiveness is far more insidious than an editorial decision to summarise an event for reasons of brevity. Rather, such a calculated decision to project a one-sided narrative of events is driven primarily by the desire to promote the commentator's own ideological agenda. The implication of such cherry-picking is all the more serious when the commentator projects such a skewed narrative to the masses through the use of political demagoguery. This can be further accentuated by the choice of language in order to promote a given media narrative.

This much is evident in multiple aspects of the Trump Administration. Since coming into office, Trump and several of his advisors and officials have established a clear track record of deliberately selective portrayal of facts in order to advance their own agenda. As early as the 2016 Presidential campaign, Trump had identified white, working-class Americans in the Rust Belt as the section of the electorate most hostile to his Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton, whilst at the same time being most easily swayed by irresponsible rhetorical demagoguery (Jacobson, 2018). At the same time, without feeling any sense of responsibility or accountability to the voting public, Trump was all too willing to cherry-pick data to portray an image of white, working-class Americans as being threatened by immigration and the narcotics trade from Latin American countries, crime perpetuated by African Americans, Lone Wolf terrorism by Middle Easterners, and unfair trade practices by China and other industrialised nations (Kessler and Lee, 2016). Although such a portrayal of demographic and sociological trends had little basis for reality, the projection of such an exaggerated image of

a dystopian American future raised alarm bells in voting districts that had historically supported the Democratic Party, which ended up voting for Trump in November 2016.

Such a deliberate distortion of facts has continued to characterise the Trump White House. Shortly after entering office, the Trump Administration attempted to ban citizens from various Middle Eastern and North African countries from entering the United States, on the grounds that such persons posed the threat of Lone Wolf terrorism in the country. Yet, it is notable that of the countries that Trump targeted in his "Muslim travel ban" under Executive Order 13769 in 2017 – Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen – none had citizens who were involved in the 9/11 terrorist attacks, or any of the various terrorist attacks against the US since 2001 (Cordesman, 2017). Moreover, Trump's one-sided responses to terrorist incidents further highlights his deliberate stigmatisation of Muslims as the primary terrorist threat to US security, even though such a perspective overlooks the fact that home-grown, white supremacists are statistically far more likely to be the perpetrators of Lone Wolf terrorist attacks in the United States (Hassan 2018). Such deliberate bias was evident during the "Unite the Right" rally that took place in Virginia in August 2017, during which a white supremacist named James Alex Fields drove a car into a group of counter-demonstrators, killing one person and injuring 19 others. In spite of the blatant nature of the xenophobia behind this action as well as the presence of white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan engaged in rioting during the rally, Trump blamed "many sides" for the violence in Charlottesville, and pointedly refused to acknowledge the culpability of white supremacist organisations for the violence (Merica, 2017).

More recently, in 2018 Trump has increasingly seized on the image of Latin Americans fleeing violence in their homelands to seek asylum in the US as an imminent criminal "infestation" (Klein and Liptak, 2018). Furthermore, Trump's divisive discourse has been further aided by Fox News hosts adopting language that downplays the humanitarian catastrophe inflicted by the Trump Administration on Latin American families fleeing violence in their homelands – as an example, Fox News host Laura Ingraham referred to the detention facilities used to hold Latin American refugees as "summer camps", a term that is directly contradicted by well-publicised evidence pointing to the forcible separation of Latin American children from their families, and the use of small, cramped cages used to implement these family separations. Such a portrayal of non-Caucasians entering the United States again played to the emotional fears of the white working-class Americans who had supported Trump in 2016, in casting Trump as a figure willing to use authoritarian methods to maintain the demographic status quo.

Such deliberate distortion of news, however, has multiple effects. Not only is the image of Latin American migrants as criminals definitively disproven by statistical evidence (Ferriss, 2018), it also overlooks the fact that agricultural industries in the United States are heavily dependent on migrant labour from the Latin American region (Dudley, 2018). Moreover, in engaging in such irresponsible demagoguery without any regard for the reality on the ground, such willingness to project a distorted media narrative that dehumanises non-Caucasians has also emboldened racists, xenophobes and bigots at the grassroots level into engaging in vigilante attacks as well as verbal and physical abuse of Latin Americans, African Americans, Middle Easterners and other persons deemed to be "un-American" in the eyes of Trump's working-class supporters (Graham, 2018).

Threat 3: Conspiracy theories

Closely related to the cherry-picking of facts is the emergence of websites and blogs that promote conspiracy theories. Often founded and run by self-proclaimed "investigative journalists" not beholden to corporate interests, such websites and webpages appear to be more legitimate in the eyes of an uninformed public that has become disillusioned with mainstream media. Such a development is all the more so given the desire held by the masses for a rigid interpretation of freedom of speech, even if this results in a situation in which irresponsible demagogues are placed in a position to deliberately inject falsehoods into the mainstream media narrative. In so doing, however, the operators of such sites are in a position to promote conspiracy theories as an "objective truth" that the mainstream media is attempting to suppress, as part of a wider effort to skew media narrative discourse into following a given ideological agenda (Fish, 2018).

This much is evident based on the activity of Info Wars and Breitbart, to name but two particularly notorious purveyors of conspiracy theories. Both websites have a long track record of promoting far-right views that include Islamophobia, bigotry and xenophobia towards non-Caucasians, and support for a rigid interpretation of the Second Amendment in granting uncontrolled access to firearms for the general public. The willingness of such websites to exploit the news to advance their own cynical agendas was reflected following the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting that saw the death of 20 young schoolchildren and six teaching staff. Although the moral outrage over the carnage contributed to growing momentum in support of gun control legislation in the United States, Alex Jones, the founder of Info Wars, portrayed the school shooting as an event fabricated by the Obama Administration as part of a covert strategy to dismantle the Second Amendment, thereby preventing Second Amendment enthusiasts from averting a secret Federal Government plan to impose dictatorial powers in the country (Cooper, 2018). Such cynical disregard for reality is all the more shocking given the extent to which Jones' deliberate injection of his conspiracy theory forced the families of the victims of the Sandy Hook shooting to re-live the trauma of the loss of their loved ones.

Threat 4: Justifying morally reprehensible perspectives

A further instance through which fake news attempts to skew the mainstream media narrative is reflected in attempts to justify morally reprehensible perspectives, either through adopting a revisionist interpretation of a known, controversial period of history, or otherwise through a cynical invocation of freedom of speech. This issue has become increasingly prominent in the context of the ongoing debates over the issue of statues of Confederate States of America (CSA) generals from the American Civil War. Apologists for the CSA point to idealised portrayals of CSA generals such as Robert E Lee as honourable patriots defending the sovereignty of their home state, in an attempt to gaslight the widely-held view that the system of slavery in the CSA itself was a racially-driven arrangement of economic exploitation of African Americans. Such an idealisation of Lee has been rejected by the majority of historians. Although it is accepted that Lee was not particularly committed to the institution of slavery, it is also notable that he did nothing to oppose its continued implementation in the Southern states. Furthermore, given the extent to which Lee's skilled generalship contributed to the prolongation and carnage of the American Civil War, the image of Lee as an "honourable gentleman" who was fighting for the wrong side obscures the fundamentally racist underpinnings of the CSA's existence. Equally notable was that, in the aftermath of the Civil War, Lee opposed the extension of political rights to newly-freed African Americans (Fortin, 2017).

Threat 5: Agent provocateurs

Yet a further means through which fake news can enter and skew mainstream media discourse is through the presence of agent provocateurs who exploit existing social faultlines to further sow discord and polarisation in society. Although not a new phenomenon, it has become increasingly prominent in light of the continuing racial tensions in the United States due to repeated instances of law enforcement personnel's disproportionate use of violence and lethal action against African American, even over trivial misdemeanours and, in multiple cases, the complete absence of any criminal wrongdoing whatsoever.

Following the acquittal of George Zimmerman over the shooting death of African American teenager Trayvon Martin, the civil society activist group Black Lives Matters (BLM) has gained growing momentum, a trend in tandem with the increasingly public instances of police abuses of power against African Americans. A particularly notable instance took place in 2016, following the shooting death of Philando Castile in Minnesota, an event that was captured on video and went viral on the Internet. Amidst the growing outcry from BLM activists, the Russian Government, already at loggerheads with the United States, saw an opportunity to exploit the heightened tensions in the Unites States race relations in an election year. The Internet Research Agency, an Internet troll group based in St Petersburg, Russia, and believed to be linked to the Russian Government, set up a series of fake Facebook groups such as "Don't Shoot" and "Blacktivist". Posing as the black civil rights movements protesting against police brutality in the United States, yet lacking any authentic sense of commitment and civic responsibility in ending police brutality (O'Sullivan, 2018), such sham organisations had the effect of instigating African American anger against law enforcement officers in the United States, whilst simultaneously feeding the fears of white working class Americans about the prospect of racial violence spreading into their hitherto peaceful neighbourhoods.

Threat 6: Deliberate Audio and Visual Mislabelling

Further instances that reflect the ability to generate a skewed media narrative is reflected in the willingness of people to deliberately adopt misleading labels as captions to accompany audio and visual representations of the news. One recent instance of this has been reflected amidst the efforts of Second Amendment supporters in the United States to counter the growing momentum in support of gun control legislation. In the aftermath of the death of 14 students and 3 teachers during the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Florida in February 2018, the survivors of this incident have embarked on a well-publicised nation-wide effort to demand gun control and thereby mitigate the threat of gun violence in the United States, founding the "Never Again MSD" movement. Among the leaders of the latter is Emma Gonzalez, who became notable for her oral charisma and distinctive buzz cut hairstyle. With the growing media profile of the MSD movement, firearms enthusiasts and conservatives began focusing their attention on a photograph of a young woman with a similar-looking buzz cut hairstyle supposedly vandalising the vehicle of a Second Amendment supporter, clearly in an attempt to discredit the MSD movement. Closer investigation revealed that the photograph was taken in 2007, and showed pop star Britney Spears (who had a buzz cut at the time) in a drunken rage (Chen, 2018).

Threat 7: Deliberate audio and visual distortions

In a similar light, it has become increasingly easy to generate a deliberately distorted portrayal of the news through software technology. Such attempts to generate fake news was rather more difficult during the Industrial Age, given that mainstream media in that era was dominated by the printing presses, as well as radio and television studios, all of which were

generally in the hands of established media corporations that could be held accountable through their board of trustees. The advent of the Information Age has, however, upended such assumptions. The proliferation of inexpensive computers as well as easy-to-master software such as Photoshop, Adobe After Effects and FakeApp means that it is now possible for comparative amateurs to generate realistic-looking news sources that may be taken by the untrained eye as legitimate news.

Such was the case following the devastation inflicted by Hurricane Harvey that struck Texas in 2017. As illustrated in the Figures 2, 3 and 4, Trump supporters used Photoshop to create images that made it appear as though Trump was directly involved in rescue efforts. For the purpose of comparison, the original photographs are placed alongside their Photoshopped versions, thereby reflecting how effectively Photoshop can be used to distort the media narrative.

Figure 2: Source: Snopes, 2017.

Figure 3: Source: Snopes, 2017.

Figure 4: Source: Snopes, 2017.

Whilst such images have the effect of portraying Trump as an exemplary leader willing to put his own life on the line as part of his civic responsibilities, such an image is not particularly convincing, given Trump's lack of track record for public service (*The Independent*, 2016).

Nor is such deliberate distortion of the media narrative restricted to still photographs. In response to the growing proliferation of fake news, in April 2018, film director Jordan Peele released a video which, combined the use of Adobe After Effects and FakeApp, enabling Peele to capture the oral and visual likeness of Barack Obama, making it appear though the former President had just delivered an expletive-laden personal attack on Trump (Vincent, 2018). Although Peele's video was intended to deliver a point on how fake news can be generated, the implication is clear: anyone with access to a computer and inexpensive computer software is capable of generating a realistic-appearing media narrative that may be taken as legitimate news by uncritical and unsuspecting audiences.

Conclusion: Responding to the Threat of Fake News

Based on this discussion, it is apparent that the growing phenomenon of fake news is an increasingly worrisome threat to civil society on many levels, and one that is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. In so doing, fake news will likely pose a continuing potential threat to civil society as underpinning basis for democracy. The latter, as a cornerstone of the post-1945 liberal world order, is based on the freedom of speech to stimulate public debate and thereby ensure the public accountability and transparency of elected government officials to their constituents. Yet, the injection of fake news into the media narrative undermines objectivity in the presentation of facts before the members of civil society. Worse still, when wilfully manipulated and distorted by politicians, journalists and other public figures willing to project their own spin onto the unthinking masses, existing faultlines of social and demographic polarisation become further internalised. Fake news, in appealing to the masses' confirmation bias, results in an echo chamber that prevents meaningful, constructive conversations and debate in addressing national policy challenges. This problem is further accentuated by the emergence of such a highly charged atmosphere, within which increasing numbers of self-appointed vigilantes have taken it upon themselves to engage in various acts of verbal and physical abuse towards people of opposing viewpoints, or different ethnic and religious backgrounds (Mathias, 2017).

In addressing the challenge posed by fake news, it is necessary to recognise that there are no quick fixes. Although it may be tempting to regard state censorship as one possible means of

filtering fake news out of the mainstream media narrative, there are limitations to such an approach. To some degree, a certain level of censorship is useful in preventing demagogues from inciting their followers into engaging in violence against ethnic and religious minorities. Such has been the case of Singapore, which introduced legislation in the 1960s authorising media censorship to prevent demagogues from abusing the freedom of speech to incite communal violence (Arnold, 1996). However, the power of censorship, if left unchecked, is open to abuse by government authorities that may be tempted to turn to such methods to serve their own political ends (Gall, 2018). Furthermore, even in fully-functioning democracies, the use of censorship may backfire on the government. Such has been the case of Germany, which has legislation banning hate speech targeting ethnic and religious minorities, as well as Holocaust denial or glorification of the Nazi regime. Although such measures worked well in the aftermath of 1945 due to the recentness of historical memories of the Nazi regime, more recent attempts to invoke such legislation to counter the activities of the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party have been less successful. Given the history of censorship and authoritarianism in the Nazi-era and in the former East Germany, the AfD has been able to point out that the present-day German state's attempts to enforce censorship under the Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG) of January 2018 is a hypocritical attack on democracy (Kinstler, 2018). In addition, given that attempts to enforce censorship in Germany do not change the growing concerns held by many ordinary Germans over the long-term feasibility of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's liberal asylum policies for refugees, attempts to enforce censorship are all the more likely to arouse further, long-term resentment that plays into the AfD's hands.

A more productive means of countering the implications of fake news is to be found in the promotion of a culture of civil discourse and a willingness to agree to disagree peacefully, as well as in ensuring that educational curriculums support efforts to the fostering of such civil society. As Russell Roberts noted,

> We like simple stories without too much nuance – stories that often demonize the other side and its conflicting vision of the truth … So we convince ourselves that the evidence speaks so loudly, so emphatically, that we have no choice but to declare our allegiance to a particular tribe. But it rarely crosses our minds to notice that the tribe we are in determines the evidence we notice and accept … The result is an unjustified confidence in one's own side of the debate … This means an end to not just civilised conversation, but often to any kind of conversation at all. (Roberts, 2018, n.p.)

Such an outcome is unsatisfactory for many reasons. At best, it prevents meaningful civil society debate in addressing challenges like climate change, gun violence, racism, immigration and other pressing issues; at worst, it can cause basic policy disagreements to degenerate into violence. In counter to this, the fostering of a culture of civility may, by providing an environment conducive for civil conversation and an ability to agree to disagree, offers a more constructive basis for debate and decision-making (Morant, 2018).

In addition, in order to mitigate the impact that fake news may have on an increasingly digitised society faced with a growing array of Internet websites (more than a few of which are purveyors of fake news), it is all the more important to ensure that the youth of the future are provided with an appropriate curriculum. The latter has to reject the type of intellectual superficiality arising from the use of Wikipedia, but instead embraces a culture of fact-checking for accuracy. In combination with source triangulation, an observer trained in the

culture of fact-checking for accuracy has a better chance of mitigating the impact of bias and fake news found on the Internet.

Whilst the author emphasises that such approaches should not be seen as a panacea that eliminates the problem of fake news, it may be considered a step in the right direction. Amidst the growing polarisation of society in the United States due to the proliferation of fake news and conspiracy theories, the criticality of generating a culture in which policy disagreements can be debated in seeking a constructive solution to society's challenges is manifest. In this sense, it may be helpful to recall the following observation by Charles Spurgeon:

> Wisdom is the right use of knowledge. To know is not to be wise. Many men know a great deal, and are all the greater fools for it. There is no fool so great a fool as a knowing fool. But to know how to use knowledge is to have wisdom.

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