



FAKE NEWS AND FALSE FUTURE

By Wilfred Hahn

In recent times, “fake news” and “false media” have come into the public awareness. Why recently? Fake news and so-called “alternative facts” were purported to have been major factors in the recent U.S. election outcome. A malleable sense of truth created false realities and “media spin” that served political agendas. Non-truth and bias were broadly accepted as political tactics ... so long, of course, that these lined up with one’s cause and preferred perspectives.



As such, many apparently came to the lamentable conclusion that there is no such thing as “truth” in the public arena of discourse ... nor any “telling it like it is” ... nor “just the facts, ma’am,” as Detective Sergeant Joe Friday of the television series *Dragnet* used to say.

News reporters and policymakers therefore could no longer be counted upon to transmit unbiased and unvarnished facts. Rather, the media was mostly seen to be sold out to biased opinion, viewership numbers and profits. Of course, political candidates of all stripes also sought influence with spin and bias. In that sense, the news and politicians suited each other ... in fact, they actually need each other.

Fake news is not news, though it certainly seems it is becoming much more accepted and widespread today. But can we say that

these are new trends? Says one analyst, Chris Hedges of *Truthdig*, journalists and the media companies have long ago abandoned reporting the news. Quoting him directly: “The media landscape in America is dominated by ‘fake news’: It has [been] for decades. This fake news does not emanate from the Kremlin. It is a multibillion-dollar-a-year industry.”¹

The Bible has another word for “fake news”: it is called “lying.” As such, of course, fake news originated much earlier. It has been around in one form or another since the dawn of time.

However, let’s return to more recent times. Fake news in print media really only came into existence about the same time that news began to be widely circulated; this being around the time that Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1439. Almost immediately—and ever since—there were issues of poor journalistic ethics; confusion about what was true and false, and “news for hire.”



Along the way, we also note that what is called news today is often nothing more than stories that entertain. Much of popular news content is trivial—Hollywood output, and updates on the rich and famous.

While press media today takes many forms, ownership concentration is nevertheless prevalent in most channels ... not just domestically, but also globally.

Today, the media business is a very large industry globally, and ownership has become increasingly concentrated in recent decades. This is true globally as well as domestically for most high-income countries.

For example, consider that 7 or less companies control greater than 50% of the print media in America today. According to a 2016 survey by *Forbes* magazine, 15 billionaires in America controlled the entire media industry. Merger negotiations are ongoing.

Indeed, the greed and profit motive most certainly plays a large role, as well as political bias. There can be no doubt that the major media companies are beholden to their shareholders. This applies to the whole corporatist profit model. In this sense, media businesses are no more culpable than any other public corporation. In fact, media companies have made no bones about this.

As the head of Westinghouse once put it (which at the time owned CBS, the television network), “We are here to serve advertisers. That is our *raison d’être*.”² Other media heads were in broad agreement. Rubin Frank (a former NBC news president) said, “News is what someone wants to suppress. Everything else is advertising.”

As the corporate culture took dominance and competition between different media heated up, the pressure to “produce” news that people will want to read increased. Again

quoting Chris Hedges, “Journalists long ago gave up trying to describe an objective world, or give a voice to ordinary men and women. They became conditioned to cater to corporate demands.”

In fact, many journalists openly work as scribes to the powerful and influential ... repackagers and spinners of the new “sound bite” so as to meet alternative agendas of perhaps lobbies, industries or individual wealthy people.

As a result of all the above-mentioned trends, says George Friedman (the intrepid geopolitical analyst and founder of *Geopolitical Futures*): “The prestige press, as we used to call it, squandered its inheritance from prior generations of journalists and lost its right to pronounce the truth.”³

Along the way, we also note that what is called news today is often nothing more than stories that entertain. Much of popular news content is trivial—Hollywood output, and updates on the rich and famous. The newscasters on the popular news channels tend to have movie star good looks and makeup. Female journalists are shown to be sitting on tall stools dressed in short skirts. Youth and gossip sells.

Real news—past, present and future—receives scant mention. As well, balanced international news continues to shrink from the public domain, even during these times of foreign anti-terrorism activities. What international news does catch the eye of mass media channels is either superficial or selected for its entertainment or propaganda value.



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Illusion Is Truth

The idea that illusion and falsehoods can be peddled for truth—even convincing an entire society to discard reality—is an old one. It was an idea first promoted in the Garden of Eden. “Did God really say ...?” (Genesis 3:1). Satan promoted a lie, spinning the truth.

However, for the most part, people tend to like to believe lies. Why? Because the message of the lies will seem pleasing to them. Knowing them to be lies, they yet will accept them.

The prophet Zechariah confirms in his two visions in Zechariah 5, that “lying and stealing” will define the essence of human society in the last days. But, just how can one achieve the task of making everyone believe lies?

Adolf Hitler, evil as he was, was a master observer of the human psyche. (So is Satan ... “the father of all lies”: John 8:44). Quoting Hitler: “All propaganda has to be popular and has to accommodate itself to the comprehension of the least intelligent of those whom it seeks to reach.” He used this understanding to great harm and celebrated this vulnerability, saying: “What luck for rulers that men do not think.”

But, what is propaganda? It is anything that chooses to manipulate truth. However, its outlets today are virtually everywhere, especially given new technologies: the wide reach of the Internet, commercial and social media (i.e. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram ... etc.).

What is popular, or what will “go viral” is not necessarily truthful nor likely to be important news. However, this “stream” of blogs, news sites, Facebook and YouTube postings (to mention just some of the major social sites) produces a type of new shared reality for societies.

Richard Sennett, in his book *The Fall of Public Man*, makes the observation that a “[...] collective personality [is now] generated by common fantasy ... and those that can manipulate and shape those fantasies determine the directions taken by the ‘collective fantasy.’” To endorse (i.e. ... to accept as one’s view of life and the world) the “collective personality of common fantasy” is frankly to be misled and ungodly.

Thoughts to Ponder

The Bible says that anyone who seeks comfort in worldly things and perspectives builds on sand. It is the words of Christ we are to hear and heed, not the fantasies of the world (Matthew 7:26). Says James: “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (James 4:4).

In an earlier article in this space, we documented the topic of global media concentration. The focus of that article was the deluge of information and entertainment that took up an increasing proportion of people’s focus and thinking time (see “The Business of Snatching Minds,” MCM, November 2004).

There, we quoted Senator John McCain, who at the time was worried about the possible effects of continuing media concentration. He said something that aligned with the enablement of Biblical prophecy (though he may not have known this): “At some point, you’ll have many voices—and one ventriloquist.”

With the common pursuit of profits and the continuing concentration of media and news, there likely will be an ever smaller group—indeed, perhaps only one individ-

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ual—who can control all media messaging in the world at some point in the future. That outcome may be some time away ... or perhaps not.

The Bible identifies two creatures that may be future candidates for the role of such a “one-world ventriloquist”—the Antichrist and the False Prophet.

While “fake news” has at its origin the Father of all Lies, its reign of lawlessness over the world has surely progressed. George Friedman makes a broad observation about such a society, which we already largely see today: “Therefore, lies flourish, despicable charges are made, and some on each side are free to believe what they want to believe. [...] Censors and accountability no longer exist. Twitter is the place where malicious people with time on their hands can tell lies.”

But there is an additional dimension of fake news that readers should not miss. Daniel Boorstin in his book, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, alludes to it: “The very same advances which have made them [images] possible, have also made the images—however planned, contrived, or distorted—more vivid, more attractive, more impressive, and more persuasive than reality itself.”⁴

More persuasive? Could this be possible, an image that is more persuasive than reality itself? That would be a most dangerous development, as the real can then no longer be discerned from an image. Truth would be entirely undiscernible for the ungodly in such a world. Values would be unhinged from facts and truth.

In Revelation, we read of an image that is conjured up to deceive the entire world.

“Because of the signs it [the Second Beast] was given power to perform on behalf of the first beast, it deceived the inhabitants of the earth. It ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. The second beast was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed” (Rev 13:14-15).

Just what messages would proceed from such a false image? We cannot know exactly ... However, we know that “Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light” and tries to exalt himself. “It is not surprising, then, if his servants [both humans and demons] also masquerade as servants of righteousness” (see 2 Corinthians 11:14-15). Evil can be made to appear as good ... lies to imitate the truth (Isaiah 5:20).

Are these concerns and challenges that we face already today?

Apostle Paul was concerned about the treachery of the Devil’s bending of truth already 2000 years ago ... long before the printing press or the Internet. “But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3).^{MC}

ENDNOTES

- 1 Chris Hedges. *Truthdig*. “Fake News’ in America: Home-grown, and Far From New” (December 18, 2016).
- 2 *Advertising Age*. February 3, 1997.
- 3 George Friedman. *Geopolitical Futures*. “The Internet and the Tragedy of the Commons” (January 4, 2017).
- 4 Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*.