

Feature Article

Why is fake news a severe problem for democracy?: Combating fake news and checking facts in the internet age

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Democracy and nationalism

Democracy is not a perfect notion and it needs to be perpetually nurtured. It can be deteriorated and improved in accordance with changing domestic and foreign political situations. Democracy is not a constant political structure but a permanent process and it needs to be defined anew in each election by active participation of citizens. Democratic society can exist through free and deliberative public communication. 'Democracy is more than a valuable kind of political arrangement; it is also the notorious sign of a lack, of an always pending agenda that calls for the redress of social ills and further advances in the manifold matters which, at a certain time and for a certain people most concern human welfare and dignity.'⁽¹⁾

Electorates receive information about politicians, political parties, domestic and international issues through conventional mass media like TVs, magazines and newspapers, but increasingly also through SNS, Facebook, Twitter and so forth. The later can be added to mass media because many people can receive and submit information at the same time. Mass media is a kind of glue of society. Mass media is 'binding institution of the society.'⁽²⁾

Politicians need support from electorates if they want to be elected again in order to maintain their power. Mass media build an image of politicians. Therefore Politicians want control over mass media, SNS and public opinion. The power elites if necessary resort to nationalism and patriotic sentiments to win the next election. In this sense, nationalism even in a democratic context can serve as a very useful tool as the cases of the Brexit campaign in England, the slogans and arguments of Donald Trump like 'America first' and 'I will make America strong again', Erdogan's victory in the referendum in Turkey and the extreme rightist movements in European countries, have shown. Political parties, interest groups and active citizens try to lead and mislead public opinion to win the election by manipulating national feelings. Overflow of immigrants, terrorism, unstable social situation, high unemployment rate caused by import from other countries and so on are common topics to mobilize voters. If necessary, to close national borders is a permissible policy. Trump for example argued that 'a nation without borders is not a

nation. Beginning today the United States of America gets back its control of borders, gets back its borders.'⁽³⁾ He justified his policy to build a wall between U.S.A. and Mexico to stop illegal immigrants and drug traffickers. I must add that the idea to build the wall impresses not only him but many other politicians.

Multi-party-system and democratic constitution are therefore no guarantee for good functioning of a democracy. Electorates need correct information and fair political sense and strong will to participate in the process of democracy. In the internet age, acquiring and collecting information becomes very easy and without much cost and time. There is no doubt that advanced IT and its accessibility has facilitated political participation but at the same time this easiness underpins negative side-effects. The internet is a useful tool for citizens but equally useful for those who want to control public opinion and to discredit opinions of others. By surfing for information, people feel often embarrassed and become at a loss because there are so many controversial claims and opinions in SNS, tweets and websites that it is difficult for ordinary people to decide which information is trustworthy and which is not. Some webpages will try to destruct validity of information by showing false data. Such fake news combined with nationalism can mislead public opinion and construct another truth and destruct democracy. Every day we find hate speech and racial discriminative arguments and comments on the internet. Social-psychological, ideological and egoistic ways of thinking produce such misinformation. Everybody must know in the internet age how information is constructed and how we should collect information. We must learn in schools and also at universities how we deal with such information and how we can detect and combat disinformation. Media companies have lost their power to build opinion because young people quit subscription of newspapers. The financial crisis in those branches shut down many famous newspapers and many employees are fired.

Demonizing others and self-glorifying

Negative labeling towards others and self-glorifying are usual phenomena which can be observed everywhere. Self versus others, democratic regimes versus authoritarian regimes, Western

countries versus non-Western countries, Islam versus Christianity, developing countries versus advanced countries, our country versus neighboring countries, ethnic minority like immigrants versus domestic majority are common dichotomies. Each receives positive and sufficient media coverage in its own national media while he or she receives negative and insufficient media coverage about other countries. The perception of journalists is different when it comes to reporting about their own country or other countries. Information flow for audience is not well balanced. Please ask yourself which news you consume more, news of domestic origin or news of foreign origin. The news of foreign origin is catered to the population of the home country in such a manner to be able to consume it. Such news has often a hidden message of national ideology. There is no wonder that the people are exposed, in the course of time to nationalists' rhetoric without taking notice of it while their opinion is unconsciously nurtured with such hidden messages and convinced of collective rightness of their own position. Own wars must be holy and others' wars are to be condemned, for example.

In the name of holy war, many innocent people are killed. Journalists, if their nation deploys military attack, may report that a high death toll is very sad but unavoidable or it is a kind of collateral damage to solve the problem or to bring peace. American citizens need not to have bad consciousness for the drop of A-bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Negative labeling towards the neighboring countries is common phenomenon. To blame is often another nation. No country can be indifferent to neighboring countries. In the course of time, there are discriminating perception patterns, self-piteous frames and narcissistic prejudice and heroic national history. People cannot be objective and neutral to their own understanding. This is a kind of collective memory of history. What makes the matter worse is the journalistic reporting manner. 'For one thing, journalists' reporting on conflicts in their neighborhoods does often belong to one of the groups involved in the violence.'⁽⁴⁾ The people who consume such information become sooner or later nationalists. They will not be ready to change their stance. Ana Pastor, director of El Objetivo writes that 'people don't want their ideas questioned, they want them reaffirmed' (<https://reporterslab.org/category/fact-checking/>). Many international conflicts are results of such nationalistic perceptions of the world. For this purpose, mass media, politicians, experts, historians, etc. are mobilized. Isolationism and wall building between us and others are rational decisions for narrow-minded people. The thought that danger and conflicts always come from outside is so deep-rooted that it is impossible to eliminate it.

Is the internet a democratic tool to facilitate citizens to participate in the political process?

Shortly after 2000, many media scholars and activists believe that the internet is a democratic tool. In Arab uprisings, people were organized by using SNS and they overthrew authoritarian governments. However, the once highly praised Arab spring revolution has not realized democracy, but ended in conflicts

and violence and the collapse of states. A crowd of people is not well organized and lacks the political plan for a long time span.

In my opinion, the internet is not panacea for a matured society. First, public opinions in the social media are often nothing than opinions produced by power elites. Second, people find there the opinions which are not normally presentable in real life. Opinions of ultra-rightists, nationalists, racists can find their community on cyber space. They do not care whether their arguments lack legitimacy and truth for the rest of people. The like-minded people strengthen their opinion and disseminate it by using homepages, SNS, comments of news articles, Facebook and so forth. SNS is an echo-chamber of political sounds. Fake news is constructed to rebut public opinion. What is fake news? '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,' according to Webopedia.

Political parties and interest groups equipped with IT knowledge and abundant resources can use the internet to manipulate public opinions to their own interest. Stencel (In 'Fact Check This': How U.S. politics adapts to media scrutiny, in: American Press, on May 13, 2015) writes: 'Political actors regularly "weaponize" fact checks. Candidates, staff and supporters, including party organizations and independent expenditure groups, cite fact checks in TV ads and debates to refute attacks and undermine opponents' credibility. Political organizations also mischaracterize fact-checkers' reporting or present the journalists' conclusions in ways that are inaccurate or misleading'.

Even though in highly developed-countries almost everybody has access to the internet, there is no sign that democracy is well functioning as the presidential election campaign in America shows. The New York Times wrote on July 8, 2017 in an article 'Trump Team Met With Lawyer Linked to Kremlin During Campaign': 'American intelligence agencies have concluded that Russian hackers and propagandists worked to tip the election toward Mr. Trump, and a special prosecutor and congressional committees are now investigating whether his campaign associates colluded with Russians. Mr. Trump has disputed that, but the investigation has cast a shadow over his administration for months'.

Allegedly the Russian government wanted to influence the presidential election in the U.S.A. for Trump by using fake news. Will Oremus wrote in his article 'Russia Used Fake News to Influence the Election, Says U.S.A. Intelligence Chief' published in Future Tense on Jan. 5, 2017: 'Fake news was part of the Russian government's attempt to influence the U.S. presidential election, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said in a Senate hearing Thursday morning. Sen. Jack Reed, a Rhode Island Democrat, asked Clapper about allegations that Russian government-backed groups had created or propagated false news stories as part of a broader campaign that included hacking and stealing emails. Clapper replied: This was a multifaceted campaign. So the hacking was only one part of it, and it also entailed classical propaganda, disin-

formation, fake news’.

The term fake news became so common in the world after Trump even though they are not recent phenomena. In the article of the Nation (the oldest magazine in the U.S.A.) published on March 24, 2017 ‘Donald Trump’s Rise Has Coincided With an Explosion of Hate Groups’, Michelle Chen wrote: ‘According to the Southern Poverty Law Center’s (SPLC) annual census of “extremist” groups, “The number of hate groups in the United States rose for a second year in a row in 2016 as the radical right was energized by the candidacy of Donald Trump.” The number of explicitly anti-Muslim groups has nearly tripled since 2015 alone, to over 100 nationwide. There has also been a spike in reported incidents of “hate” violence, including harassment and physical assault, alongside rising anti-Muslim hostile behavior and bullying in schools. Of nearly 1,100 “bias incidents,” SPLC reports, “37 percent of them directly referenced either President-elect Trump, his campaign slogans, or his infamous remarks about sexual assault.”’

There are special entrepreneurs which produce fake news in exchange for payment. Lion Gu, Vladimir Kropotov, and Fyodor Yarochkin Forward-Looking Threat Research (FTR) report interesting things in their paper ‘The Fake News Machine: How Propagandists Abuse the Internet and Manipulate the Public’ how to make fake news and how much such manipulation may cost. To manipulate public opinion, to instigate attack against politicians and to discredit journalists becomes easier and cheaper by internet. One can buy such a campaign beyond national borders (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Price to discredit a journalist

Source: <https://www.trendmicro.com/vinfo/us/security/news/cyber-crime-and-digital-threats/fake-news-cyber-propaganda-the-abuse-of-social-media>.

Repeated posting of an opinion can be made not only by real persons but also by computer programs. They use many home-pages and other SNS at the same time and try to build links with each other so that fake news can easily spread. They tweet and re-tweet to disguise popularity. They abuse SEO-system (Search Engine Optimization system) to maximize their propaganda. Ordinary citizens may have opportunity to encounter such sites knowingly and unknowingly when they seek intensively for opinions related to some news. In SNS and in comments of news, they are full of such extreme opinions and hate speeches.

Nationalists and extremists gather extreme opinions and submit them to other people. The people in a closed circle consume only such information which they favor. Cass R. Sunstein names it ‘the daily me’ phenomenon. ‘What is also striking is that many extremist organizations and hate groups provide links to one another, and expressly attempt to encourage both recruitment and discussion among like-minded people’ (Sunstein 2007, 58). Participants of the internet and SNS strengthen their extreme opinions with each other. Sunstein describes it as ‘group polarization’. ‘The term “group polarization” refers to something very simple: after deliberation, people are likely to move toward a more extreme point in the direction to which the group’s members were originally inclined’.⁽⁵⁾ Those people will not hesitate to attack opposite opinion. This is a mechanism of hate speech.

In my opinion, such a narrow range of information gathering is promoted further by so-called curation media. Students and citizens in the internet age read news increasingly via the internet. They will not subscribe to newspapers. Curation media filter interesting news from newspapers, TV, SNS and so forth. Why is it possible for students and citizens to read news without a fee? News media grant certain articles for free use in hoping that their articles may bring people to subscribe to their newspapers. From what kind of criterion do such curation news sites select certain news? Curation sites earn money by advertisements on their news sites. Every click on their news means revenue for the sites. They try to detain visitors of their sites as long as possible and to persuade them to click further on their sites. The curation sites have experiences on what kind of news and events can attract visitors. They have developed a curation app for this purpose, an AI program to select news even though the last choice is often made by the editorial staff. If a visitor clicks on a certain article or a certain topic, similar articles or topics from news sites and SNS are automatically recommended. So the visitor of curation news sites become well informed on the same issue. Such a reading habit inevitably narrows the users’ world view.

Editorial staff search in SNS, Youtube and so on if they cannot receive enough interesting news and they will not control over fake news and hate speech because those are very sensational and can appeal to users. That means they are very lucrative. Nationalism and hate speech as I have mentioned above are hard to overcome. Politicians, journalists, power elites use nationalism to secure their power position. The population is nurtured with nationalistic mindset in the course of time. Google, Yahoo, Facebook and so forth provide platforms on which everybody can write their own comments to news and discuss with other participants.

There is good-based discussion but there are also false and hypocritical ones. The internet companies are charged for their passive consent to let fake and false news on their sites to attract visitors. To exclude certain entry from platforms can be also criticized as a kind of censorship. The fundamental rule of democracy is to tolerate even opposite and extreme opinions as long as they are not against human rights. Freedom of speech is the fundamental right for functioning democracy. If they do not do anything against hate speech, it means that they have

accepted racial discrimination and supported false information. To exclude news of certain political tendency from their sites is also difficult to justify. This is a big dilemma. Facebook is criticized to have omitted intentionally conservative news on May 11, 2016 according to the article of the News Week (Lee: Is Facebook—and Zuckerber—liberal or conservative? It's complicated, data shows, in News week, published on May 11. 2016). The Japanese curation website operator DeNa was also criticized on March 12, 2017 because it had not taken any appropriate measure to eliminate articles and websites with unlawful copies, plagiarism and fake news. It became the biggest fake news scandal in Japan and the stock value of DeNa sank.

In Japan the draft of law for the elimination of racial discrimination proposed by the Democratic Party of Japan was discarded but the law of counter-measures against hate speech proposed by the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan was approved on May 24, 2016. This law in Japan is in reality a kind of recommendation without punishment and lacks legal force to stop hate speech.

There is an interesting joint research by the University Rikkyo and Yahoo Japan about hate speech. The result of the research is published in an article 'Anti-Korean and anti-Chinese sentiment in the news comments—Analysis of Yahoo News' on April 28, 2017 by asahi.com. Yahoo Japan has a news website. Visitors can read news on its news topics. The visitors of the site can write comments to the news. Professor Tadamasu Kimura (social network) at the University Rikkyo and Yahoo News (curation site of Yahoo) analyzed together news comments of visitors in the first week of April 2015. According to Yahoo News, they will in average submit 120,000 news articles per month. The number of comments and impressions mounts to 6.6 million per month. They investigated around 10,000 hard news about politics and social aspects and more than hundreds of thousands of comments. Almost 20 % of comments are related with South Korea and 5 % of comments are about China. 80 % of insulting comments are about South Korea. 1 % of commentators submit more than 100 remarks in a week. Comments of those heavy users of 1 % make 20 % of all comments. This investigation points out the fact that heavy users repeatedly write offending comments towards the neighboring countries. Yahoo News tries to delete such comments but it is almost impossible to eliminate hate speech completely. Many Japanese users read nationalistic and racist comments. Cultivation theory teaches us that they can be influenced in the course of time. Among the people who write not so often, there are also some whose positions are very negative towards the neighboring countries.

In the internet age many people do not subscribe to newspapers and instead they try to surf. If they click on certain news, they are recommended to read similar news so that they can consume the news with a similar tendency. It is a very dangerous situation. What can we do against hate speech? Professional strategists, experts and activists who submit hate speech have extreme but convincing argumentations. How can we

refute their positions? Who can discern truth from untruth? If we seek for data even for an extreme opinion, we can find it in the internet age. Therefore it is very difficult to evaluate it. We live in a post-truth era. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "post-truth" as 'relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.'

If ordinary citizens submit fake news or hate speech, mass media will not cover such postings on the internet. But how about when power elites, even a president or a prime minister becomes a source of such fake news or hate speech? They can control information in order to keep unfavorable documents secret. If there are neither evidence nor documents to verify or to falsify, it is very difficult for oppositional parties to attack such power elites. This is not an imaginary problem but a concrete problem under which Japan and U.S.A. now suffer.

It is therefore hardly surprising that 88 % of American population say that fabricated news cause them a great deal of confusion or somehow confused as the result of the investigation of PEW Research center conducted on December 1-4, 2016.

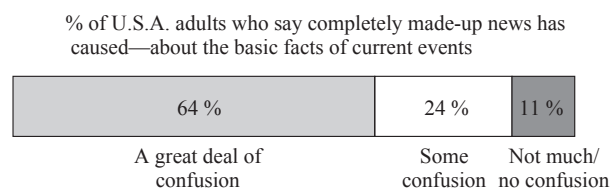


Figure 2: Majority say fake news has left Americans confused about basic facts

Source: Survey conducted December 1-4, 2016. "Many Americans believe fake news is sowing confusion", PEW Research Center.

The American magazine Wired.com (<https://www.wired.com/2017/02/veles-macedonia-fake-news/>) writes an interesting article of fake news factories from Macedonia in which many young people earn money from their sites of fake news. Fake news catches many readers and brings money. As a result, they might have intervened into U.S.A. politics. Vales in Macedonia, once the second most populated city in Yugoslavia, lost its industries after independence. Hopeless youths sit behind laptops and submit fake news to earn money. According to the article, one of such youths, Boris 'sensed the intrinsic viral potential in the American election and founded NewYorkTimesPolitics.com, a website that resembled The New York Times homepage and carried plagiarized articles on American politics'. A similar story was published on December 5, 2016 from the BBC magazine with the title 'The city getting rich from fake news':

A 19 years old student Goran (pseudo-name) 'began putting up sensationalist stories, usually plagiarised from right-wing American sites, last summer. After copying and pasting various articles, he packaged them under a catchy new headline, paid Facebook to share it with a target US audience

hungry for Trump news and then when those Americans clicked on his stories and began to like and share them, he began earning revenue from advertising on the site. Goran says he worked on the fakery for only a month and earned about 1,800 Euros (£1,500) - but his mates, he claims, have been earning thousands of Euros a day. When I ask him if he worries that his false news might have unfairly influenced voters in America, he scoffs’

The Japan Times writes in the article ‘Russia-linked “computational propaganda” campaigns seen distorting public opinion worldwide’ published on June 21, 2017:

“Computational propaganda is one of the most powerful new tools against democracy,” said the research paper directed by Oxford’s Philip Howard and Samuel Woolley. “We know that there is a building with hundreds of employees in St. Petersburg with a budget of millions of dollars dedicated to manipulating public opinion” in a number of countries, Howard said at a media presentation.

Samuel C. Woolley, and Philip N. Howard (2017, 4) wrote in their workshop papers ‘Computational Propaganda Worldwide: Executive Summary’:

‘Interviews with political party operatives, freelance campaigners, and elections officials in seven countries provide evidence that social media bots—and computational propaganda more broadly—have been used to manipulate online discussion.

Some social media platforms, in particular political contexts, are either fully controlled by or dominated by governments and organized disinformation campaigns. Some 45 percent of Twitter activity in Russia is managed by highly automated accounts. Significant portions of the conversation about politics in Poland over Twitter are produced by a handful of right-wing and nationalist accounts.’

This is a new situation. One can easily manipulate and influence public opinion by using computer programs. Computer programs are very cheap but they produce opinion and attack the opinions of others. What happens if simulate human beings, real nationalists and terrorists together aim at influencing on their own and another country? Is this not the exact situation in America? Public opinions are discredited, fabricated, managed and manipulated. Electorates become at a loss to build opinion and will lose interest in politics. Politics is deteriorated to a thing of information management without content. The main purpose of fake news, is in my opinion, exactly this: electorates lose interest in politics. Democracy becomes hollowed from inside.

How to combat nationalism, hate speech and fake news in SNS and national media?

To prevent wars and severe domestic and international con-

flicts counts as one of the most important tasks of journalism. At first it is necessary to educate people that nationalism can cause severe conflicts and wars. Politicians who play with nationalism commit a crime. Freedom of expression is important and should be maintained but it is not absolute, rather a relative value. Hate speech, fake news etc should not be tolerated because they can hollow democracy from inside. No country can afford unlimited freedom of speech. Hate speech is ‘a question of journalistic ethics.’⁽⁶⁾ As I have mentioned, we enter into a new situation of the internet era. Democracy itself is endangered. How can we get back democracy?

In the internet age, there is no reasonable control over hate speech without meaningful cooperation of internet provider companies. EU and IT companies (Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube) announced on March 31, 2016 in Brussels a code of conduct on hate speech. The following is the code of conduct on countering illegal hate speech online:

- The IT Companies to have in place clear and effective processes to review notifications regarding illegal hate speech on their services so they can remove or disable access to such content. The IT companies to have in place Rules or Community Guidelines clarifying that they prohibit the promotion of incitement to violence and hateful conduct.
- Upon receipt of a valid removal notification, the IT Companies to review such requests against their rules and community guidelines and where necessary national laws transposing the Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA, with dedicated teams reviewing requests.
- The IT Companies to review the majority of valid notifications for removal of illegal hate speech in less than 24 hours and remove or disable access to such content, if necessary.
- In addition to the above, the IT Companies to educate and raise awareness with their users about the types of content not permitted under their rules and community guidelines. The notification system could be used as a tool to do this.
- The IT companies to provide information on the procedures for submitting notices, with a view to improving the speed and effectiveness of communication between the Member State authorities and the IT Companies, in particular on notifications and on disabling access to or removal of illegal hate speech online. The information is to be channeled through the national contact points designated by the IT companies and the Member States respectively. This would also enable Member States, and in particular their law enforcement agencies, to further familiarize themselves with the methods to recognize and notify the companies of illegal hate speech online.
- The IT Companies to encourage the provision of notices and flagging of content that promotes incitement to violence and hateful conduct at scale by experts, particularly via partnerships with CSOs, by providing clear information on individual company Rules and Community Guidelines and rules on the reporting and notification processes. The IT Compa-

nies to endeavour to strengthen partnerships with CSOs by widening the geographical spread of such partnerships and, where appropriate, to provide support and 3 Article 16 of Directive 2000/31/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 8 June 2000 on certain legal aspects of information society services, in particular electronic commerce, in the Internal Market ('Directive on electronic commerce', OJ L 178, 17.7.2000), indicates that Member States and the Commission shall encourage the drawing up of codes of conduct at Union level, by trade, professional and consumer associations or organisations designed to contribute to the implementation of its Articles 5 to 15. 3 training to enable CSO partners to fulfil the role of a "trusted reporter" or equivalent, with due respect to the need of maintaining their independence and credibility.

- The IT Companies rely on support from Member States and the European Commission to ensure access to a representative network of CSO partners and "trusted reporters" in all Member States to help provide high quality notices. IT Companies to make information about "trusted reporters" available on their websites.
- The IT Companies to provide regular training to their staff on current societal developments and to exchange views on the potential for further improvement.
- The IT Companies to intensify cooperation between themselves and other platforms and social media companies to enhance best practice sharing.
- The IT Companies and the European Commission, recognising the value of independent counter speech against hateful rhetoric and prejudice, aim to continue their work in identifying and promoting independent counter-narratives, new ideas and initiatives and supporting educational programs that encourage critical thinking.
- The IT Companies to intensify their work with CSOs to deliver best practice training on countering hateful rhetoric and prejudice and increase the scale of their proactive outreach to CSOs to help them deliver effective counter speech campaigns. The European Commission, in cooperation with Member States, to contribute to this endeavour by taking steps to map CSOs' specific needs and demands in this respect.
- The European Commission in coordination with Member States to promote the adherence to the commitments set out in this code of conduct also to other relevant platforms and social media companies.

Equally it is necessary to combat fake news because it can also undermine democracy. How can we know whether news is fake or truth? How can we check facts? It is almost impossible to check facts for ordinary people because they have not enough time, enough knowledge in politics and in IT and lack financial resources. They are not trained enough how to have access to data that normally power elites hold. Under these circumstances, internet companies and mass media companies that provide

platforms, websites, SNS etc., must become conscious of social responsibility of such organs. Facebook, for example announced a guide to fake news. The following is the advice on how to check facts published in an article of the Independent 'Here is Facebook's guide to fake news' on May 9, 2017:

- Be skeptical of headlines
'False news stories often have catchy headlines in all caps with exclamation points. If shocking claims in the headline sound unbelievable, they probably are'.
- Look closely at the URL
'A phony or look-alike URL may be a warning sign of false news. Many false news sites mimic authentic news sources by making small changes to the URL. You can go to the site to compare the URL to established sources'.
- Investigate the source
'Ensure that the story is written by a source that you trust with a reputation for accuracy. If the story comes from an unfamiliar organization, check their "About" section to learn more'.
- Watch for unusual formatting
'Many false news sites have misspellings or awkward layouts. Read carefully if you see these signs'.
- Consider the photos
'False news stories often contain manipulated images or videos. Sometimes the photo may be authentic, but taken out of context. You can search for the photo or image to verify where it came from'.
- Inspect the dates
'False news stories may contain timelines that make no sense, or event dates that have been altered'.
- Check the evidence
'Check the author's sources to confirm that they are accurate. Lack of evidence or reliance on unnamed experts may indicate a false news story'.
- Look at other reports
'If no other news source is reporting the same story, it may indicate that the story is false. If the story is reported by multiple sources you trust, it's more likely to be true'.
- Is the story a joke?
'Sometimes false news stories can be hard to distinguish from humor or satire. Check whether the source is known for parody, and whether the story's details and tone suggest it may be just for fun'.
- Some stories are intentionally false
'Think critically about the stories you read, and only share news that you know to be credible'.

Fake News becomes a big problem even for the academic world. The library of Harvard University for example recommends their students 5 ways to spot and stop fake news. Figure 3 was retrieved on June 28, 2017.

Pace University (<http://libguides.pace.edu/fakenews>) also recommends some ways to avoid fake news and makes advice on what to do and what to avoid. The first recommendation is



Figure 3: How to spot fake news
Source: <http://guides.library.harvard.edu/fake>.

to read/ watch/ listen very widely. Information should be taken from 'generally reliable sources are (some of which require a subscription)'. As reliable sources the following are listed 'the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Boston Globe, the Wall Street Journal, Forbes, the Atlantic, National Public Radio, PBS NewsHour, the Economist, the Pew Research Center, Democracy Now, as well as various local sources'. It is therefore wise to avoid visiting certain websites with 'distorted headlines and de-contextualized or dubious information'. The University lists up websites such as, Politicalo, AmericanNews.com, ConsciousLifeNews.com, CountdownToZeroTime.com, BipartisanReport.com, FreeThoughtProject.com, and so forth.

In the internet age, political movements should also be changed. It is not enough to propagate their agenda and ideas. By the mean of fact-check, electorates should be guided to the websites with high political quality and should be educated not to visit the websites with fake news. To support financially fact-checker and fact-check sites is very important for the functioning of democracy. They need to involve journalists, internet-experts, scholars and other stakeholders to be able to gather information from reliable institutions and organizations and to maintain websites. To stop fake news submitters who are information tech-savvy as above-mentioned, fact-checkers must also be information tech-savvy. It costs time and energy to check

whether information, opinions and other claims made by politicians, activists are true or not true but it is indispensable.

In the meantime there exist many fact-check organizations like news organs, sites holders and other citizens' organizations. I introduce some interesting attempts. Washington Post Fact Checker which will tell readers how far the claims of power elites are reliable with Pinocchio Test.



One Pinocchio

'Some shading of the facts. Selective telling of the truth. Some omissions and exaggerations, but no outright falsehoods. (You could view this as "mostly true.")'



Two Pinocchios

'Significant omissions and/or exaggerations. Some factual error may be involved but not necessarily. A politician can create a false, misleading impression by playing with words and using legalistic language that means little to ordinary people. (Similar to "half true.")'



Three Pinocchios

'Significant factual error and/or obvious contradictions. This gets into the realm of "mostly false." But it could include statements which are technically correct (such as based on official government data) but are so taken out of context as to be very misleading. The line between Two and Three can be bit fuzzy and we do not award half-Pinocchios. So we strive to explain the factors that tipped us toward a Three.'



Four Pinocchios

'Whoppers.'



The Geppetto Checkmark

'Statements and claims that contain "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" will be recognized with our prized Geppetto checkmark.'



An Upside-Down Pinocchio

'A statement that represents a clear but unacknowledged "flip-flop" from a previously-held position.'



Verdict Pending

'There are occasions when it is impossible to render a snap judgment because the issue is very complex or there are good arguments on both sides.'

The Washington Post concluded on July 15, 2016 by the article 'Trump versus Clinton': The Pinocchio count so far' the claims of the two presidential candidates Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Trump as following:

Trump (52 rated claims)

- Four Pinocchios: 33 (63 percent), Three Pinocchios: 11 (21 percent)

- Two Pinocchios: 5 (10 percent), One Pinocchio: 1 (2 percent)
Geppetto Checkmark: 2 (4 percent)
- Clinton (36 rated claims)
- Four Pinocchios: 5 (14 percent), Three Pinocchios: 13 (36 percent)
- Two Pinocchios: 11 (30.5 percent), One Pinocchio: 2 (5.5 percent)
- Geppetto Checkmark: 5 (14 percent)

Readers can examine an article of the Washington Post according to the number of Pinocchios. It can be a good orientation for them. I will name some other important fact-check sites.

- BuzzFeed
- Poynter
This is an international fact-checking network.
- First Draft Partner Network
- FactCheck.org
This site belongs to the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania which is in Washington DC. Many former journalists and scholars are staff of the center. The center is supported by the university and funds from individual persons not from any corporations.
- Politifact
- FIJ (Fact-Check Initiative Japan)
It is the first fact-checking site in Japan, established on June 21, 2017. This site is now developing a fact-check guide line and will upgrade ability to check facts. FIJ hosts a memorial fact-check symposium “Fact-Checking in the Post-Truth Era: the PolitiFact Experience” on April 22, 2018 at Waseda University. In comparison with other countries, fact-check of Japan is far behind. Lack of funds and shortage of staff are big problems for the further development of this site.

There are also fact-check apps to point out fake news:

- BS Detector (Chrome, Firefox, Safari)
- This is Fake (Chrome, for Facebook feed)
- Trends and Robocheck
This is the name of two automated fact-checker of British fact-check site.
- Full Fact
This site is now building with the support of Google by the end of 2017. ‘The first program is ‘a “tool for fact-checkers” that shows how far a claim has been spread online. It will help those checking details to ask for corrections to be made’. The second, Robocheck, ‘will aim to provide accurate information in real-time’.
- SpyOnWeb
With this site one can check the website operators. If they operate many websites at the same time and there is similar news, then the possibility of fake news is very high.
- Botornot
It is an app to detect bots for Tweet. Nowadays people

gather information of public opinion and comments even in Tweet. What happens if such comments are automatically produced by social bots, i.e. by automated programs?

What is truth in the post-truth age? Katherine Maher, executive director of the Wikimedia Foundation said at the conference of Global Fact 4 held on July 5-7, 2017 in Madrid that ‘truth is an imperfect entity. The truth is malleable, biased, incomplete and ever-changing with the whims of history’ (<https://reporterslab.org/global-fact-4-fact-checking-summit-day-2-highlights/>). If it is so, how is it possible to combat nationalism and hate speech in SNS and national media? Negative media coverage of others nurtures strong nationalism and hostility. There are overall verbal and military conflicts. National media takes sides with self and report one-sidedly. The articulation in SNS is to a certain degree a reflection of national media. In order to combat nationalism and hate speech, national media should change their reporting habits. They should report on others more objectively and free from national interest. Reporters should consider before they produce news whether their products contribute to peace and conciliation. Preventive and responsible journalism must be a compulsory discipline for future journalists. Culture of tolerance should be promoted. People of the internet age must be equipped with internet skill and also with insight into information technology. Internet companies must help for the better society and to curb hate speech and nationalistic opinions. IT companies and curation sites prohibit certain people to write their similar opinions too often because bots of social media may have submitted and produced their opinion. Fact-check groups must check political messages especially from abroad. Citizens should avoid visiting fake news sites. To visit such sites helps financially hate speakers and nationalists from inland and abroad. Each click on such sites will damage freedom of speech and democracy. In the long run, your behavior could make the election system itself obsolete and endanger national security and in the very end even global peace.

Notes

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- ⁽³⁾ CNBC’s News (2017). Trump: Beginning today the US gets back control of its borders. <http://www.cnbc.com/video/2017/01/25/trump-beginning-today-the-us-gets-back-control-of-its-borders.html>.
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- ⁽⁵⁾ Sunstein, C. R. (2007). *Republic.com2.0*. Princeton, p. 60.
- ⁽⁶⁾ Petreska, E. (2005). Hate speech and the Macedonian media, considering the recent war, July 4, 2005, Media Online 2005, p. 2.