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DEFINING "FAKE NEWS"
A typology of scholarly definitions

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This paper is based on a review of how previous studies have defined and operationalized the term "fake news." An examination of 34 academic articles that used the term "fake news" between 2003 and 2017 resulted in a typology of types of fake news: news satire, news parody, fabrication, manipulation, advertising, and propaganda. These definitions are based on two dimensions: levels of facticity and deception. Such a typology is offered to clarify what we mean by fake news and to guide future studies.

KEYWORDS facts; fake news; false news; misinformation; news; parody; satire

Introduction

On December 4, 2016, a man carrying an assault rifle walked into a pizza restaurant in Washington, DC. He was intent on "self-investigating" whether the restaurant, Comet Ping Pong, was the headquarters of an underground child sex ring allegedly run by then presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and her former campaign manager, John Podesta (Lopez 2016). He was motivated by stories he had read on right-wing blogs and social media that had developed this line of thought. In the process of his "self-investigation," he fired several shots into the ceiling of the restaurant. No one was injured, but it was just one of the several threats made to the pizzeria after the news report spread through social media sites, such as Facebook, Reddit, and Twitter (Lopez 2016). The viral news report, however, was a hoax. The District of Columbia's Metropolitan Police Department also officially declared it as a "fictitious conspiracy theory" (Ritchie 2016).

Pizzagate, as the conspiracy theory was later called, is just one of the numerous fake news stories that flood social media (Ritchie 2016; Silverman 2016). From Pope Francis endorsing then Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, to a woman arrested for defecating on her boss' desk after she won the lottery, fake news stories have engaged—and fooled—millions of readers around the world (Silverman 2016). A 2016 survey commissioned by news and entertainment site BuzzFeed found that "fake news headlines fool American adults about 75% of the time" (Silverman and Singer-Vine 2016, para. 1). In many cases, readers ignore the fake news stories they come across, but in some cases the consumption of fake news leads to concrete actions. For example, at the ministerial level, Pakistan's defense minister tweeted on December 23, 2016 a menacing response to a false report that Israel had threatened

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Pakistan with nuclear weapons (Goldman 2016). World leaders, such as former US President Barack Obama and Pope Francis, the leader of the Roman Catholic church, have expressed concern over the spread of fake news (Gardiner and Eddy 2016; Pullella 2016). Studies have also started to look at the implications of fake news, not only in terms of confusing readers (Barthel, Mitchell, and Holcomb 2016) but even in potentially affecting election results (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017).

The term "fake news" is not new. Contemporary discourse, particularly media coverage, seems to define fake news as referring to viral posts based on fictitious accounts made to look like news reports. A recent study defined fake news "to be news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers" (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017, 213). Two main motivations underlie the production of fake news: financial and ideological. On one hand, outrageous and fake stories that go viral—precisely because they are outrageous—provide content producers with clicks that are convertible to advertising revenue. On the other hand, other fake news providers produce fake news to promote particular ideas or people that they favor, often by discrediting others (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017). Fake news has now become a buzzword, but current references to it seem to define it differently from earlier definitions. Earlier studies have applied the term to define related but distinct types of content, such as news parodies, political satires, and news propaganda. While it is currently used to describe false stories spreading on social media, fake news has also been invoked to discredit some news organizations' critical reporting, further muddying discourse around fake news.

Therefore, this paper reviews how fake news has been defined by other scholars and, based on these definitions, provides a framework to conceptualize the different types of fake news that have been identified in the literature. Through an analysis of 34 scholarly articles published between 2003 and 2017, this paper identified a typology of fake news definitions guided by the domains of facticity and intention.

Understanding Fake News

The Role of Social Media

Misinformation in the media is not new. It has been with us since the development of the earliest writing systems (Marcus 1993). A classic example of widespread misinformation dates back to 1938, when the broadcast of a radio adaptation of H. G. Well's drama *The War of the Worlds* frightened an estimated one million residents (Cantril 2005). By adopting a radio news format via the relatively new technology of radio, complete with actors playing the roles of reporters, residents, experts, and government officials, radio drama director Orson Welles found a clever way of narrating the story of Martian invasion. While his intention was to entertain listeners, the radio adaptation assumed the form of a live news report, in a period when radio was the main source of information in the United States. While the intention of Wells and the Mercury Theatre of the Air was to produce a piece of radio drama, listeners interpreted it as factual news (Cantril 2005). Now that online platforms, particularly social media, are becoming the main sources of news for a growing number of individuals, misinformation seems to have found a new channel.

The digitization of news has challenged traditional definitions of news. Online platforms provide space for non-journalists to reach a mass audience. The rise of citizen journalism challenged the link between news and journalists, as non-journalists began to engage in journalistic activities to produce journalistic outputs, including news (Robinson and DeShano 2011). Citizen journalists were initially confined to blogging. Eventually, social media offered a wider platform for non-journalists to engage in journalism (Wall 2015). Through their social media accounts, users can post information, photos, videos, and narratives about newsworthy events they witness first-hand (Hermida 2011; Jewitt 2009). Journalists have also followed the audience and increased their presence on social media. Initially, they treated it as just another platform with which to promote their news stories (Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton 2011), but eventually they started using it to break stories and interact with audiences (Tandoc and Vos 2016). Twitter, for example, became a perfect platform to quickly disseminate details about a breaking event (Hermida 2010). Not only did social media change news distribution, it has also challenged traditional beliefs of how news should look. Now, a tweet, which at most is 140 characters long, is considered a piece of news, particularly if it comes from a person in authority.

Facebook, the most popular social media platform, claims to have more than 1.23 billion daily active users as of December 2016 (Facebook 2017). While it started as a site through which we can share personal ideas and updates with friends, it has morphed into a portal where users produce, consume, and exchange different types of information, including news. A survey carried out in the United States found that 44 percent of the population get their news from Facebook (Gottfried and Shearer 2016). Social media sites are not only marked by having a mass audience, they also facilitate speedy exchange and spread of information. Unfortunately, they have also facilitated the spread of wrong information, such as fake news.

An important facilitator of such distribution is how social media blur the conceptualization of information source. A news organization might publish a news-based article, but that article can reach an individual through a dedicated news site, via the news organization's Facebook site, or through a "shared" posting of their social network. Social media users, therefore, have to navigate through a multitude of information shared by multiple sources, which can be perceived "as a set of layers with various levels of proximity to the reader" (Kang et al. 2011, 721). Receiving information from socially proximate sources can help to legitimate the veracity of information that is shared on social networks. However, users seldom verify the information that they share.

Social media also makes the bandwagon heuristic more salient, as each post is accompanied by popularity ratings (Sundar 2008). When a post is accompanied by many likes, shares, or comments, it is more likely to receive attention by others, and therefore more likely to be further liked, shared, or commented on (Thorson 2008). Popularity on social media is thus a self-fulfilling cycle, one that lends well to the propagation of unverified information. More recently, we have also seen the development of so-called news bots that automate this self-fulling cycle, adding what the unwary reader of the news might interpret as legitimacy of the item (Lokot and Diakopoulos 2016).

What is News?

The question of fake news brings up the question of how to think about the nature of *real* news. News has been defined in a number of ways, ranging from being an account of a recent, interesting, and significant event (Kershner 2005), an account of events that significantly affect people (Richardson 2007), to a dramatic account of something novel or deviant (Jamieson and Campbell 1997). News is often seen as an output of journalism, a field expected to provide "independent, reliable, accurate, and comprehensive information" (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2007, 11). Since the "primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing," journalism is expected to report, above all things, the truth (17). A central element in the professional definition of journalism is adherence to particular standards, such as being objective and accurate. Along with the responsibility of the profession comes power. Thus, journalists have occupied an influential position in society, namely one that can amplify and confer legitimacy to what it reports (Schudson 2003).

At the same time, news is socially constructed, and journalists often exercise subjective judgment on which bits of information to include and which to exclude (Herman and Chomsky 2002; Tuchman 1978). Thus, news is vulnerable not only to journalists' own preferences (White 1950), but also to external forces, such as the government, audiences, and advertisers (Shoemaker and Reese 2013). News is also a unique commodity, for while it is sold to audiences, news audiences are subsequently sold to advertisers (McManus 1992), making it vulnerable to market forces. Still, news is expected to include accurate and real information. A landmark survey of American journalists, for example, differentiated journalists as those involved in the production of reality, instead of symbolic media content (Johnstone, Slawski, and Bowman 1976). Journalists "*make* the news" but it does not mean they *fake* it (Schudson 1989, 263).

So what makes fake news fake? If news refers to an accurate account of a real event (Kershner 2005), what does *fake* news mean? News is supposedly—and normatively—based on truth, which makes the term "fake news" an oxymoron. The word "fake" is often used interchangeably with words such as copy, forgery, counterfeit, and inauthentic (Andrea 2016). The Oxford Dictionary defines "fake" as an adjective which means "not genuine; imitation or counterfeit." A study about detecting fake websites distinguished two types: "spoof sites," which imitate existing websites, and "concocted sites," which are "deceptive websites attempting to appear as unique, legitimate commercial entities" (Abbasi et al. 2010, 437). A study about fake online reviews also specified the role of intention in defining what is fake. The study defined fake reviews "as deceptive reviews provided with an intention to mislead consumers in their purchase decision making, often by reviewers with little or no actual experience with the products or services being reviewed" (Zhang et al. 2016, 457).

Others situate fake news within the larger context of misinformation and disinformation (Wardle 2017). While misinformation refers to "the inadvertent sharing of false information," disinformation refers to "the deliberate creation and sharing of information known to be false" (Wardle 2017, para. 1). The term "fake news" has entered not just scholarly discourse but even daily conversations, invoked not only in efforts to point out false information but also in efforts to demonize traditional news organizations. Therefore, understanding the concept of fake news is important. Such an effort

will allow a systematic study of not only what makes individuals believe in fake news, but how fake news affects public discourse. Since the term is not new, and has been used in numerous contexts across different scholarly studies, it is useful to review the different ways fake news has been defined.

A Typology of Fake News

This paper is based on a review of published academic studies that used the term "fake news." The analysis focused on how each of the studies defined and operationalized the term. The researchers used the search term "fake news" to find academic articles through Google Scholar and a library database of academic publications. This procedure found 34 articles, published between 2003 and 2017. While the majority of the articles studied fake news in the context of the United States, a few were conducted in Australia, China, and Italy. Most articles studied it from a journalistic perspective, while other disciplines include psychology, computer science, and political science. While fake news is an instance of misinformation (Wardle 2017), we focused on academic articles that used the actual term "fake news" in order to identify the different ways the term has been used and defined. A careful reading of each article identified six ways that previous studies have operationalized fake news: satire, parody, fabrication, manipulation, propaganda, and advertising. What follows is an overview of the way the term has been used in these papers.

News Satire

The most common operationalization of fake news in the articles reviewed is satire, referring to mock news programs, which typically use humor or exaggeration to present audiences with news updates. An example of such programs is *The Daily Show* on Comedy Central in the United States (Baym 2005). These programs are typically focused on current affairs and often use the style of a television news broadcast (a "talking head" behind a desk, with illustrative graphics and video), much as a regular news program. Nonetheless, a key difference is that they promote themselves as delivering entertainment first and foremost rather than information, with hosts calling themselves comedians or entertainers, instead of journalists or newscasters. The programs are produced with a rather transparent humorous motivation. They are injected with humor to maintain the interest of the typically younger audience using wry, sarcastic, or over-the-top graphics or comments. Unlike traditional broadcast news, these programs are done before an audience who is heard to laugh as the punch lines are read.

Despite the exclusion of satire from mainstream media outlets, several studies argued that these satirical programs are an increasingly important part of the media ecosystem. Their use of humor is not perfunctory; rather, humor is often used to provide critiques of political, economic or social affairs. In essence, they are equal parts of informing and entertaining. Indeed, Kohut, Morin, and Keeter (2007) found that individuals who watch satirical programs are as knowledgeable about current affairs as individuals who consume other forms of news media. Satirical programs are also acknowledged to have significantly shaped public discourse, opinions, and political

trust (Brewer, Young, and Morreale 2013). One niche they occupy in the media landscape is their ability to situate daily news pieces within a larger context (Kohut, Morin, and Keeter 2007; Reilly 2012). For instance, *The Daily Show* often compares the remarks of politicians with their past remarks, sometimes from many years previous, with the effect of underscoring inconsistencies or contradictions. While previous studies have referred to political news satires as fake news, their being fake only refers to their format. They take the form of newscasts for the sake of humor, playing on exaggerated style, outlandish faux reporting, laughter of the live audience, etc. However, the core content of political satires are based on actual events.

News Parody

Parody is a second format which previous studies have referred to as fake news. It shares many characteristics with satire as both rely on humor as a means of drawing an audience. It also uses a presentation format which mimics mainstream news media. Where parodies differ from satires is their use of non-factual information to inject humor. Instead of providing direct commentary on current affairs through humor, parody plays on the ludicrousness of issues and highlights them by making up entirely fictitious news stories. One of the most common examples is the parody website *The Onion* that indeed has, on occasion, been mistaken for an actual news website. The art of political parody plays on the vague plausibility of the news item. The reader might believe, or want to believe, that "tearful Biden carefully takes down blacklight poster of topless barbarian chick from office wall" (*The Onion* 2017c) or that "North Korea successfully detonates nuclear scientist" (*The Onion* 2017b). *The Onion* illustrates how parody-making maps onto fake news. In the case of successful news parody, the authors, with a "wink" to the audience, carry off sophisticated balance between that which may be possible and that which is absurd. Unlike most satires which make clear its non-journalism role, only the grandiose claims of *The Onion*, such as its readership of "4.3 trillion," hint at it not being a mainstream news source (*The Onion* 2017a).

Berkowitz and Schwartz (2016) argued that news parodies play a role similar to that of satire, namely that they form part of the "Fifth Estate," along with non-mainstream media sources such as columnists and bloggers. The Fifth Estate creates a unique boundary *vis-à-vis* mainstream news media by enabling critiques of both people in power and also of the news media. By serving as watchdogs of the press, satirical and parody sites help ensure that professional journalistic conduct is maintained, helping to improve the credibility of news media. Parody news, as well as news satire, are different from other forms of fake news in that there is the assumption that both the author and the reader of the news share the gag. In the case of news parody, the content is fabricated. The lampooning of either legacy news sources or a person in power is a shared joke. In some cases, the parody can be too subtle, and the item can be picked up and receive coverage in mainline news, as when *The People's Daily* in China ran a 55-page photo spread on Kim Jong Un inspired by a "report" in *The Onion* that he had been judged the "sexiest man alive" (BBC 2012). In cases such as this, and in cases where parody items appear in legacy news outlets such as on April Fools' Day, people can be taken in by the ruse. In these instances, the intention of the item's author and the gullibility of the reader are out of sync. That is, the disclaimers are lost

on readers who can be deceived by the article and eventually share it with others without understanding the actual premise.

News Fabrication

The third operationalization of fake news in the articles examined here is "fabrication." This refers to articles which have no factual basis but are published in the style of news articles to create legitimacy. Unlike parody, there is no implicit understanding between the author and the reader that the item is false. Indeed, the intention is often quite the opposite. The producer of the item often has the intention of misinforming. Fabricated items can be published on a website, blog or on social media platforms. The difficulty in distinguishing fabricated fake news occurs when partisan organizations publish these stories, providing some semblance of objectivity and balanced reporting. For instance, right-wing news Breitbart's report that retailer Target's share prices had dropped because of its transgender policies is questionable as there were more likely reasons for the decrease (Palma 2017).

As with the case of parody, a successful fabricated news item, at least from the perspective of the author, is an item that draws on pre-existing memes or partialities. It weaves these into a narrative, often with a political bias, that the reader accepts as legitimate. The reader faces further difficulty in verification since fabricated news is also published by non-news organizations or individuals under a veneer of authenticity by adhering to news styles and presentations. The items can also be shared on social media and thus further gain legitimacy since the individual is receiving them from people they trust. As Flanagin and Metzger (2007) demonstrated, visitors who are unfamiliar with a website's brand uses the sophistication of the website as a mental heuristic to judge its credibility. In this way, fake news outlets draw in readers (and eventually advertising revenue) by creating websites which closely mimic those of legacy news organizations. Once the reader suspends credulity and accepts the legitimacy of the source, they are more likely to trust the item and not seek verification. It is important to note that the success of fabricated items relies on pre-existing social tension. When a population has trust in a particular institution or a person, they will be less likely to accept stories that are critical. However, if there is social tension—if there are serious political, sectarian, racial or cultural differences—then people will be more vulnerable to fabricated news.

An example of a fabricated story is one titled "Pope Francis Endorsed Donald Trump" (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017). It was estimated that fabricated news relating to Donald Trump was shared 30 million times on Facebook and those relating to Hillary Clinton was shared 8 million times. Approximately half of those who remembered these stories also believed them (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017). There are two relatively new dimensions to the issue of news fabrication. One is the financial motive of the author; the other is the development of news bots that give the illusion of widespread acceptance of a news item. Looking at the former, the motivation for producing fabricated news is not simply to sway political meaning. Indeed, in some cases it can be developed for financial reasons, that is, to attract clicks that in turn will be attractive to advertisers. During the recent US election, for example, some people in Macedonia exploited the possibilities of automated advertising bots, such as Google AdSense, to

make money from fabricated stories (Subramanian 2017). The more people clicked on the false stories, the greater the income flowing into the bank account of the author. In some cases, the people producing these stories were not motivated by pursuing a political goal, only the pecuniary dimension of the issue (Subramanian 2017). Thus, the more believable the story and the more it piqued the interest of the eventual reader, the greater the income for the producer.

The second new issue with fabricated news is the development of news bots. It is not only the content and the format that make fabricated items seem like real news, but also the illusion that they are widely circulated. Indeed, fake news sites regularly rely on an "ecosystem of real-time propaganda" composed of a network of bogus bot-powered sites that automatically push the same set of fake news stories (Albright 2016). This gives the reader the sense that many others are also reading (and eventually liking) the item and if they go to another site to verify the item, they will likely find it there, again adding a veneer of legitimacy to the piece. In sum, fabricated news plays on some of the same dimensions as news parody, without the implicit agreement between the author and the consumer that it is false. Instead, the author is not acting in good faith and is motivated by economic or political motivations.

Photo Manipulation

Fake news has also been used to refer to the manipulation of real images or videos to create a false narrative. Where the previous categories generally referred to text-based items, this category describes visual news. Manipulation of images has become an increasingly common occurrence with the advent of digital photos, powerful image manipulation software, and knowledge of techniques. Effects may range from simple to complex. Simple adjustments can include increasing color saturation and removing minor elements. More-invasive changes can include removing or inserting a person into an image.

Mass media is no stranger to utilizing these techniques to catch the audience's eye. Most recently, this has been studied in the context of citizen journalism and social media, marked by information overflow and difficulties in the verification of shared information and images. This is compounded by sharing habits among users who often share posts without verifying their authenticity. Zubiaga and Ji (2014) used this operationalization of fake news in their study of manipulated photos that were circulated on Twitter during Hurricane Sandy in 2012. They examined many examples of photo manipulation, one of which was a photo that showed the Statue of Liberty in New York City being battered by waves, with a superimposed logo that made it appear to originate from a live broadcast by channel NY1. However, the photo was actually a composite of a fictitious disaster movie and an actual image from Hurricane Sandy (Zubiaga and Ji 2014).

Most legacy news media are committed to truth and draw the line at altering images to create a misleading or inauthentic narrative. For instance, the Reuters code of ethics on image manipulation states that it is primarily a "presentational tool" using effects like balancing an image's tone and color, but there can be "no additions or deletions, no misleading the viewer by manipulation of the tonal and color balance to disguise elements of an image or to change the context" (Reuters 2017). In 2003, a *Los*

Angeles Times journalist was dismissed for merging two actual photos into one, as he had sufficiently changed the narrative of the images (Campbell 2003). However, on social media, there are currently no similar codes on sharing manipulated images, much less a way to enforce any code of ethics to ensure that manipulated images do not misinform readers or even unnecessarily cause panic. Manipulations are often based on facts, but include embellishments that have no factual basis.

An increasingly widespread practice involving photos is what we refer to as *misappropriation*. While none of the studies reviewed for this study used the term "fake news" to refer to misappropriation, numerous cases have been documented. A recent example is the viral sharing via Twitter of a photo showing buses purportedly being gathered to transport anti-Trump protesters (Maheshwari 2016). A Twitter user with about 400 followers saw a collection of buses in Austin, Texas and assumed they were being used to transport people to the upcoming anti-Trump protest, when they were actually being used to transport attendees at a non-related conference. The user took three photos and posted them along with a comment condemning the protesters on his Twitter feed. One of his followers posted the tweet on social news-sharing site Reddit, where it was also reposted to Facebook and other conservative websites. It was eventually shared more than 370,000 times. The virality of the photo seemed to verify the conservatives' belief that the protesters were not authentic, that they were being supported or perhaps paid to join the protest. This was a case of a non-manipulated photo taken out of its original context—intentionally or not—to represent a different context. The photo may be factual, but it was misappropriated to support a concocted narrative.

Advertising and Public Relations

In the material we have examined, fake news has also been used to describe advertising materials in the guise of genuine news reports as well as to refer to press releases published as news. For example, one report referred to video news releases (VNRs) as "fake TV news" (Farsetta and Price 2006, 5). VNRs are pre-packaged video segments produced by public relations firms aimed at selling or promoting a product, a company, or an idea. In this context, fake news was defined as "when public relations practitioners adopt the practices and/or appearance of journalists in order to insert marketing or other persuasive messages into news media" (5). Nelson and Park (2015) also examined the use of VNRs and conducted an experiment in which audience's beliefs about and credibility toward VNRs were measured in response to pre- and post-disclosure of their sources. Such video releases were considered fake news as they are produced by third parties, often advertising or public relations agencies, and they are provided to television news outlets for possible incorporation into an actual news report. Although the content's usage is determined by news agencies, the obscuration of its origins may mislead audiences into believing that the news produced is entirely free of bias. A clear distinction with regards to public relations or advertising-related fake news *vis-à-vis* the other types of fake news examined here is the emphasis on financial gain. This dimension may be a part of other forms of fabrication that often primarily focus on political manipulation, but in this case, it is central.

In some instances, news may function as fulfilling both advertising and news goals through an advertising format termed *native advertising*. A prominent example is that of a 2014 news feature published on *The New York Times*' website on women's incarceration. This was used to promote the television program *Orange is the New Black* (Deziel 2014). At first read, it appears to be a genuine news feature as the content includes official sources, statistics, interviews, and scholarly studies. It is only by examining the presentation that one would understand it to be an advertisement. A banner at the top of the page shows that it is a paid post, while disclaimers at the bottom state that no news or editorial staff was involved with the publication (Deziel 2014). This form of "native advertising" is usually based on facts, albeit an incomplete set, often focusing on the positive aspects of the product or person being advertised. It takes advantage of the news format, however, to confer more legitimacy to its one-sided claims.

The use of "clickbait" headlines, designed to encourage the reader to "click," thus moving the reader to a commercial site, is also on the rise. For example, a promoted post on Facebook that went viral in March 2017 showed a headline and a photo of what appeared to be a news item about a wealthy Middle Eastern man arrested for speeding in the United Kingdom. The headline suggested that he had told the police that his car was more expensive than the police officer's annual salary. The item generated negative, even racist, comments, with some saying the man should be deported. However, clicking on the post did not take the user to any news article, but rather to a marketing website. This type of item can also be described as fake news, banking on news values to attract attention, but misleading a lot of people in the process, even sowing anger for something that did not happen (Chen, Conroy, and Rubin 2015).

Propaganda

Finally, our material shows that there has been increased interest in the concept of propaganda due to its relevance to political events in recent years. Propaganda refers to news stories which are created by a political entity to influence public perceptions. The overt purpose is to benefit a public figure, organization or government. One study investigated news stories on Channel One, an official Russian news channel that is broadcast both locally in Russia and internationally (Khaldarova and Pantti 2016). While it is a type of legacy news agency, it does not adhere to the same journalism code as news outlets in western democracies. The study indicates that news from Channel One may be construed as "strategic narratives" and "a tool for political actors to articulate a position on a specific issue and to shape perceptions and actions of domestic and international audiences" (Khaldarova and Pantti 2016, 893). Indeed, Channel One was found to have published factually untrue news stories to influence public perceptions of Russia's actions (Khaldarova and Pantti 2016).

It is also worth noting that there is a gray zone between advertising and propaganda as overlapping motives may be present. For instance, one study investigated people who were paid to post comments on social media platforms and forums (Chen et al. 2013). The posters were recruited by an online game and an anti-virus company to promote positive news about their respective products and negative news about competitors. Even though the postings were not explicitly advertising, the underlying

commercial motive is still financial gain. Similar to advertising, propaganda is often based on facts, but includes bias that promotes a particular side or perspective. Such blending of news and commentary, while not unheard of in journalism, hides behind the appropriation of being an objective piece of news; however, the goal is often to persuade rather than to inform.

So What Does Fake News Mean?

Fake news has become a buzzword, especially after the 2016 presidential elections in the United States, a democratic exercise marked by loads of misinformation and false news (Albright 2016). Mainstream news outlets have reported extensively about fake news, and even political institutions around the world have discussed ways to curb the phenomenon (Scott and Eddy 2017). Yet fake news is not a new term. It has a long legacy reaching back centuries, but even in the past decade it has shifted meaning. A review of previous studies that have used the term fake news reveals six types of definition: (1) news satire, (2) news parody, (3) fabrication, (4) manipulation, (5) advertising, and (6) propaganda.

What is common across these definitions is how fake news appropriates the look and feel of real news; from how websites look; to how articles are written; to how photos include attributions. Fake news hides under a veneer of legitimacy as it takes on some form of credibility by trying to appear like real news. Furthermore, going beyond the simple appearance of a news item, through the use of news bots, fake news imitates news' omnipresence by building a network of fake sites. This is a clear recognition of news' place in society, but by misappropriating news' credibility, fake news might also undermine journalism's legitimacy, especially in a social media environment when the actual source of information often gets removed, or at least perceived at a distance (Kang et al. 2011).

Facticity and Intention

This review of fake news definitions from academic publications allows us to identify two domains, each of which constitute a continuum, from high to low. This model allows us to map out the various types of fake news discussed in the literature. The first dimension, facticity, refers to the degree to which fake news relies on facts. For example, satire relies on facts but presents it in a diverting format, while parodies and fabricated news take a broad social context upon which it fashions fictitious accounts. Native advertising uses one-sided facts, while fabrications are without factual basis.

The second dimension, which is the author's immediate intention, refers to the degree to which the creator of fake news intends to mislead. News satires and parodies use some level of mutually understood suspension of reality to work—the immediate intention is to humor readers through some level of bending facts. These types of fake news assume an open disclaimer that they are not real news, a key for the intended humor to work. In contrast, the authors of fabrication and manipulation intend at the point of departure to mislead, without any disclaimer. While ultimately the goal of

TABLE 1
A typology of fake news definitions

	Author's immediate intention to deceive	
Level of facticity	**High**	**Low**
High	Native advertising Propaganda Manipulation	News satire
Low	Fabrication	News parody

fabrication and manipulation is to either misinform people or just attract clicks for advertising money, such goals are achieved through the immediate intention of deceiving people that the fake news they see is real.

Integrating these two continuums gives a typology of four general types of fake news definitions from the literature based on level of facticity and level of immediate intention (see Table 1).

This not only provides a parsimonious mapping of the different definitions of fake news across studies, but it can also provide a starting point for clarifying what we actually mean by fake news. Such clarification will allow a more focused study of the phenomenon. Specifically, current definitions seem to focus on the third quadrant, which centers on fabrications that are low in facticity and high in the immediate intention to deceive. These dimensions limit how we can deploy the term fake news in contemporary discourse and highlights the difference between labeling fabricated content as fake news, and calling out accurate reporting of an incident revealing unflattering qualities of a particular group or personality as fake news. Increasingly, some groups are deploying the term to shut down commentary they disagree with as fake news. However, the presence of opinion does not render a piece as fake news. An opinion piece that does not pass itself off as a news article and clearly identifies the author directly accountable to the opinions presented is not fake news. It is what it is—an opinion piece.

The Role of the Audience

An important factor in defining fake news currently missing from the definitions reviewed in this study is the role of the audience. In particular, an important question is: Does fake news remain fake if it is not perceived as real by the audience? In other words, can an article, which looks like news, but is without factual basis, with an immediate intention to mislead, be considered fake news if the audience does not buy into the lie?

While news is constructed by journalists, it seems that *fake* news is co-constructed by the audience, for its fakeness depends a lot on whether the audience perceives the fake as real. Without this complete process of deception, fake news remains a work of fiction. It is when audiences mistake it as real news that fake news is able to play with journalism's legitimacy. This is particularly important in the context of social media, where information is exchanged, and therefore meanings are negotiated and shared. The socialness of social media adds a layer to the construction of fake news, in

that the power of fake news lies on how well it can penetrate social spheres. Social spheres are strengthened by information exchange, and it may well be that the quality of information becomes secondary. Future studies should focus on the role of the audience in not only sharing and believing in fake news, but in legitimizing it to qualify as fake news. Another dimension of this is that fake news needs the nourishment of troubled times in order to take root. Social tumult and divisions facilitate our willingness to believe news that confirms our enmity toward another group. It is in this context that fake news finds its audience.

A clear definition of fake news, one that matches its empirical manifestation, can help in testing and building theories in news production and consumption. However, the typology we mapped out here is based only on how previous academic studies operationalized the term. For example, we disagree that news satires are fake news, at least with how we are currently defining it. But our goal is to map out how previous scholarship has defined the term. Since discourse on fake news also now takes place in the mainstream press, as journalists find themselves having to differentiate, if not defend, their work from fake news, future studies can build on the arguments we presented here to examine contemporary discourse about fake news.

Fake news has real consequences (Goldman 2016; Lopez 2016), which makes it an important subject for study. But theorizing in this area must start with a clarification of the concept. This paper reviewed previous studies that used the term and noted the range of meanings that have been attached to it. By identifying the dimensions that guided previous definitions of fake news, and in offering a typology based on such dimensions, this paper hopes to contribute to clarifying the concept and informing future—and real—studies on fake news.

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