Fact or Fake:
The Role of Media in Our Political System
WHAT IS THE LEAGUE?

Since 1920, the League of Women Voters has encouraged and informed active participation in Government, working to increase understanding of major public policy issues and to influence public policy through education and advocacy.

The League works to register voters and to provide voters with election information through voter guides, candidate forums and debates. The League does not support or oppose candidates or political parties. The League is an activist, grassroots organization whose members believe that voters should play a critical role in their democracy.

Membership is open to everyone.
TAKEAWAYS:

- **Understand** media bias vs fake news
- **Be aware** of your own bias
- **Identify** reliable sources
- **Support** quality journalism through paid subscriptions
- **Widen** your own “media diet” by reading outlets that oppose your political beliefs
- **Beware** of social media’s information manipulation
CHALLENGES OF THE 24-7 NEWS CYCLE

Too much news
Too much too fast
Erosion of journalistic standards
Free Press: Essential to Democracy

- The media as the “fourth branch” of government
- Important benefits of a free press:
  - Open expression of ideas
  - Advances collective knowledge and understanding
  - Communication with government representatives
  - Allows for peaceful social change
  - Protects individual rights
• Framers reserved vast freedoms to citizens as a protection against tyranny, which they had witnessed first-hand.
THE FIRST AMENDMENT EMPOWERS YOU!
YOU are in charge of determining what is reliable.
News Literacy is the ability to use critical thinking skills to judge the reliability and credibility of news reports, whether they come via print, television or the internet.
CHALLENGES FOR CONSUMERS

CHALLENGE 1:
INFORMATION OVERLOAD

CHALLENGE 2:
SPEED VS. ACCURACY

CHALLENGE 3:
THE BLURRING OF THE LINES

CHALLENGE 4:
OVERCOMING OUR OWN BIAS
THREE QUESTIONS:

1. WHO’S BEHIND THIS INFORMATION?
2. WHAT’S THE EVIDENCE?
3. WHAT DO OTHER OUTLETS/SOURCES SAY?
THE ROLE OF MEDIA
STRAIGHT NEWS, ANALYSIS, AND EDITORIALIZING: 
THE DIFFERENCES

- Analysis: Consider facts, frame the issue and possibly offer conclusions.
- Editorializing: Someone’s opinions
- Can one outlet do all three? YES!
  - New York Times (NYT)
  - Los Angeles Times (LAT)
  - Wall Street Journal (WSJ)
**WSJ**: U.S. Border Patrol agents used tear gas to disperse hundreds of Central American migrants in the Mexican city of Tijuana who made a rush for the border fence, as tension builds over the diminishing prospects for asylum seekers trying to enter the country.

**Fox News**: The focus on tear gas being used on the border comes after a clash between border agents and caravan migrants on Sunday, as hundreds of migrants from a caravan that originated in Central America pushed past Mexican riot police and rushed the border at the port of entry in San Ysidro. U.S. agents on Sunday shot rounds of tear gas at caravan migrants who threw rocks at law enforcement while trying to breach the border.
WSJ VS. FOX NEWS ARTICLE HEADLINES

WSJ:

U.S. Border Patrol Uses Tear Gas to Disperse Migrant Caravan
Traffic at the border crossing between San Diego and Tijuana has been suspended

Published 11/26/18

Fox News:

Border agents routinely used tear gas during Obama administration, DHS data shows

Published 11/27/18
HOW IS MEDIA BIAS VISIBLE?

- Placement in headlines
- What is or is not included in the article
- Who are the people quoted
- Opinions embedded in straight news
WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR NEWS:

- From TV… radio… newspaper… online… social media…podcasts?
- Do you notice any bias in those sources?
All ratings are based on online content only — not TV, print, or radio content. Ratings do not reflect accuracy or credibility; they reflect perspective only.
CONSOLIDATION AND CORPORATE BIAS

**CONSOLIDATION**

1983

In 1983, 90% of American media was owned by 50 companies

2011

In 2011, that same 90% is controlled by 6 companies

**Media Consolidation:**

The Illusion of Choice

Media has never been more consolidated. 6 media giants now control a staggering 90% of what we read, watch, or listen to.
Newspapers have been losing readers – especially younger ones.
More Americans get news often from social media than print newspapers

% of U.S. adults who get news often on each platform

- TV: 57% (2016), 49% (2018)
- Social media: 20% (2016), 20% (2018)
- Print newspapers: 18% (2016), 16% (2018)

Note: The difference between social media and print newspapers in 2017 was not statistically significant.
Source: Survey conducted July 30-Aug. 12, 2018.
PEW RESEARCH CENTER
A VARIETY OF OUTLETS

- Read, listen, watch media you agree and disagree with to:
  - Become a more informed citizen
  - Guard against an “echochamber”
- Understand opponents’ views
- Better defend your views
- Broaden your worldview
- Subscribe to the media you use and value
THE RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- Pros and Cons:
  - Makes it easy for people to create content
  - Makes it easy to disseminate content
  - Both real and fake content appear in a space that is not well regulated
  - Algorhythms monitor personal search trends and redirect similar content to users
  - Many Americans now get most of their news on-line
  - Users beware!
THE ROLE OF ALGORITHMS

- Algorithms are mathematical rules used by computer search engines.
- Social media use algorithms as a way of prioritizing posts that you will see in your feed based on what you have viewed before.
- Every media platform and application (app) has its own algorithms and goals set for them.
- Algorithms are responsible in part for the spread of conspiracy theories through word searches.
Summary thus far
What is FAKE NEWS

Intentional attempt to spread hoaxes or false information with the purpose of profit or influence
“FAKE NEWS” IS NOT NEW
This comic was created around 1930s
WHAT IS “DISINFORMATION”?

False information deliberately and often covertly spread in order to influence public opinion or obscure the truth
7 TYPES OF MIS- AND DISINFORMATION

- **Satire or Parody**: No intention to cause harm but has potential to fool.
- **Misleading Content**: Misleading use of information to frame an issue or individual.
- **Imposter Content**: When genuine sources are impersonated.
- **Fabricated Content**: New content is 100% false, designed to deceive and do harm.

- **False Connection**: When headlines, visuals or captions don’t support the content.
- **False Context**: When genuine content is shared with false contextual information.
- **Manipulated Content**: When genuine information or imagery is manipulated to deceive.
Click bait: content meant to evoke strong feeling (anger, fear)
Misleading headlines: Content doesn’t match
Propaganda: Political messaging meant to mislead or deceive
Satire: “tongue in cheek” meant to entertain
WHY IS DISINFORMATION SO APPEALING

- People already have a bias to believe news they already are inclined toward
- The information comes from sources that people trust
- Reading blogs, and posting on social media is not like sitting alone reading the newspaper
- People want to belong to a group
CAN YOU TELL REAL NEWS FROM FAKE NEWS?
IS THIS PHOTO REAL?

Mary and Fred Trump with son Donald in their KKK outfits, 1999.
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
FAKE NEWS!
If astronomers are right, all life on this planet could be extinguished in less than 30 years from now. Scientists at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory have detected a large object the size of Manhattan possibly on a collision course with Earth. Using their Near-Earth Object Wide-field Infrared Survey Explorer (NEOWISE), the 10-mile wide object was found approximately 51 million miles from Earth. Scientists believe that during a close encounter with Mars, the asteroid was nudged slightly off its usual orbit and may currently be on a high speed collision course with our fragile planet.

The asteroid is calculated to have a potentially lethal encounter with the Earth on March 35, 2041. Astronomers have placed the odds of an impact at 1 in 2.04, which is by far the most unprecedented risk ever faced to humanity, let alone from asteroids. Such an impact could potentially end civilization as we know it.

More information will be posted here as the story develops...
DANGER OF ‘FAKE NEWS’

- Meddling in 2016 US presidential election. Pizzagate
- Propagation of the “Big Lie”
- Fake news on social media used to harm candidates and undermine democracy
- Fake news greatly impacts Americans’ confidence in government institutions and in each other.
- Americans see fake news as a larger problem than climate change, terrorism, illegal immigration or racism and say it’s worsening.
STOLEN FACEBOOK (FB) DATA USED TO TARGET MESSAGES

Russians also paid Facebook to have this ad shown to people residing in Washington, DC:

This Russian ad was targeted to people living in South Carolina on June 30, 2016. There's no real “Black Matters” group.
THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION
Ongoing coverage of the 45th President and his new administration.

Immigration

After Officials Sign Off, Cleveland Clinic Doctor Secretly Returns Home
by Charles Ornstein
ProPublica, Today, 1:08 p.m.
Suha Abushamma had been forced to leave the United States after President Donald Trump’s travel ban. She sued, and high-level discussions led to her return.

MAJOR PROJECTS

The Rent Racket
How Landlords Sidestep Tenant Protections in New York City
● Check website address
  ○ Beware of .com extensions, e.g. .co, .ru, .cn
  ○ Scan for WordPress
● Scan headlines
  ○ Beware of politically framed content
  ○ Are other media outlets reporting this?
● Read the “About Us” section
● Pay attention to the people mentioned and quoted
● Read comments
● Pay attention to images and logos
1. **Check the URL.** From a page of search choices, choose the most likely reliable sources first by checking the URL extension of websites you find.

- The extension `.edu` means the website is from an academic institution—a good indication of reliability.
- The extension `.org` means non-profit—possibly but not necessarily more reliable than a commercial website, where the extensions are `.com`, `.net`, etc.
- The extension `.gov` means the source is some branch of government. If it takes you to raw statistics—like Census Data, a list of all clinical trials, or safety recalls, then favor those sources.

With permission of Frances Whittelsey, Journalist
Fake news can also come in the form of edited and manipulated clips and images.

- Videos taken out of context
HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=AMUC4M6W1WO

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AmUC4m6w1wo
SOCIAL MEDIA FACILITATE FAKE NEWS

- More than 40% of visits to 65 fake news sites come through social media
- Fake news spreads 6 times faster than real news
- More than a quarter of voting-age adults visited a fake news website supporting Clinton or Trump in the weeks before the 2016 election
- Seniors over 65 shared nearly 7 times as many articles from fake news domains as people ages 18-29
- Conservatives were more likely to share “fake news” stories
TOOLS TO DISCERN FACT FROM FAKE NEWS
SPOT FAKE NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- Telltale signs of fake accounts include
  - Few posts but many followers
  - Many followers but few likes and comments
  - Following unusually high number of accounts
  - Suspicious or questionable content
  - Generic images, graphics and bios
SPOT FAKE NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA (CONTINUE)

- Be aware of clear bias that evokes strong emotion
- Comes from an unknown source
- Use of fake author’s name and sources
- Note spelling and grammatical errors
- Check publication date
PROTECT YOURSELF

- **Read** beyond the headline, the full story, before liking or sharing.
- **Verify** content and accounts. Check sources, authors and identities.
- **Question** content always. Particularly question content that appeals to fear, anger or partisan extremes on either side.
- **Pause** before sharing. Memes and divisive posts are designed to bypass thinking and appeal directly to our emotions.
The best way to turn the tide is to dispel the lies.

Check out mediawise: is a nonprofit, nonpartisan project of the Poynter Institute. They recruit teens to check on-line information and train others of all ages to do so. Training videos for seniors and younger children.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykuAc8Rw6AE&list=PL4Q3mb2_k-l8WiudFIPU32pNu5i-hRqk&i
FactCheck.org
Annenberg Political Factcheck - a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center. 'Monitors the factual accuracy of what is said by major U.S. political players.'

FactChecker (Washington Post)
Weekly blog from the Washington Post.

PolitiFact.com
From the St. Petersburg Times and Congressional Quarterly. Has a 'Truth-O-Meter' scorecard checking the attacks on the candidates (includes explanations). Also see their PunditFact page.

Snopes.com
"Oldest and largest fact-checking site on the Internet".

PunditFact
"Dedicated to checking the accuracy of claims by pundits, columnists, bloggers, political analysts, the hosts and guests of talk shows, and other members of the media."

WWW.LWVHUNTINGTONNY.COM
DISCUSSION AND Q &A