

McGonagle, T. (2017). “Fake news”: False fears or real concerns?. *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights*, 35(4), 203-209.

### Synopsis

The author expanded upon the topic of fake news, a superficial, simplistic term at first glance with complex, long-term effects and wide variation. While its primary goal is to mislead, fake news can come in many different forms, causing it to be hard to criminalize without stifling “independent and critical media” and “freedom of expression and public debate” (p. 204). Most of the different forms of fake news can be found in the *Ten Types of Misleading News*, which carefully lists each category with motivations ranging from innocent fun, to money and power. McGonagle went on to discuss that “fake news” isn’t a new phenomenon, but its newfound prevalence can be linked to “the sophistication with which fake news is being produced; the scale of which it is being produced, and the speed and effectiveness” with what is being shared (p. 206). Steps have been taken to tackle these new developments without suffocating free speech like The European Convention on Human Rights and the Joint Declaration of Fake News, but with constant political figures “undermining the reputation and credibility of journalists,” McGonagle urged the need to tackle the real concerns behind the term” (p. 209).

### Key Concepts

- ***Fake news:*** “Information that has been deliberately fabricated and disseminated with the intention to deceive and mislead others into believing falsehoods or doubting verifiable facts; it is disinformation that is presented as, or is likely to be perceived as, news” (p. 203).
- ***Ten Types of Misleading News:*** “propaganda, clickbait, sponsored content, satire and hoax, error, partisan content, conspiracy theory, pseudoscience, misinformation, and bogus content” (p. 204).
- ***Internet Intermediaries:*** “Determine the availability, accessibility and prominence of content and thus wield enormous power over the dissemination of fake news” (p. 206).

### Key Quotes

- “Technology has made it easy for a wide range of actors to create content, including fake news, in a variety of formats – text, photos, videos, infographics, memes, bots, gifs, etc. and to disseminate it swiftly and globally” (p. 206).
- “It is now more difficult than ever before to verify the accuracy of content, to ascertain the identity of the content producers and to figure out whether/which vested interests have shaped the production or dissemination of the content” (p. 206-207).
- “News plays a particular role in democratic societies: it is a key source of accurate information about political and societal affairs, which informs public opinion-making and deliberative processes” (p. 204).

### Essential Question

- How can ethical journalists take back the power of news media over unqualified individuals without suffocating free speech and democracy?