

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

Synopsis

McGonagle discussed the definitional dilemmas, historical evolution and evolving technological development of "fake news" with cautionary words about the misuse and overuse of the term. The author notes that historically, disinformation presented as news came in the form of misleading types of news, like: "propaganda, clickbait, sponsored content, satire, hoax, error, partisan content, conspiracy theory, pseudoscience, misinformation and bogus content." (p 204). While some are protected first amendment types, like satire and sponsored content, others "which constitute racist expression, incitement to hatred or Holocaust denial will not benefit from protection." (p. 204). However, with the rapid development of the internet, it has become easier to create fake news content in a variety of formats and disseminate it quickly and widely. The current use of the term by politicians for anything they perceive as opposed to their views or goals, serves only to undermine credible journalism and incite violence. Further, the article notes the importance of news literacy for citizens to recognize and evaluate the content of fake news items.

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; disinformation...presented as...news." (p 203).
- **Internet Intermediaries:** "...search engines and social media network operators (which) perform key gatekeeping functions... and determine the availability, accessibility and prominence of content..." in the media ecosystem. (p.206).
- **News Literacy:** "...life skills (promoted) in order to enable...citizens to analyze and critically evaluate the substance, provenance and relevance of media and news content." (p. 207).

Key Quotes

- "...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. If news is "fake", it misinforms the public and democratic debate is polluted at the source." (p. 204).
- "... The search for truth...is all about the development and contestation of ideas in order to reach a higher level of knowledge and understanding and to make fewer errors. Even if truth itself proves elusive, the process that leads towards it is a goal in in itself and it must be safeguarded" (p.208).
- Fake news "terms can be uttered in an instant, but their sting can be long-lasting, particularly when they target journalists and the media, for whom honesty and accuracy are the tools of their trade." (p. 209).

Essential Questions

- What gatekeeping types of approaches can be used to prevent false assertions of factually reported news as fake news?