Fake News and Fake Sheiks

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It is this paper’s contention that adopting a narratological approach as Galtung and Ruge did, or in offering a quantitative analysis as Harcup and O’Neill do – most recently on Twitter (2016) – dodges key issues in the creation of news in 2018.

These issues fall under two headings – meta-frameworks such as those found in the works of Bourdieu (1996) or Habermas (1962, in ed of 1992); and intentionality and/or context. The latter is the new kid on the block. Educators need to look at the mechanisms whereby patently false stories (for example, that Hillary Clinton was running a paedophile ring out of a pizza restaurant in Washington [Beauchamp 2016]) not only dominate social media but also gain wide currency in the so-called mainstream media (MSM) and in the world of actual events (a man with a gun stormed the pizza restaurant aiming to confront the paedophiles, [Beaufort 2017]). These are not value-free influences on news.

Although Harcup and O’Neill comment (somewhat despairingly, quoting Brighton and Foy [2007]) sometimes news “just is” newsworthy, the manipulation of news media away from objective reporting and towards the imposition of “alternative facts” as cited by Presidential adviser Kellyanne Conway (Swaine 2017) is not innocent happenstance. Of course, there is nothing new in simple misrepresentation for political or commercial gain, as one might see in political campaigns like the Brexit claim of £350 million pounds a week for the NHS (Seulthorpe 2017) or offering instant beauty through advertising with primped-up models (Evans 2017). Scams like the fake sheikh and the dark arts of journalism have been around for a long time, too (Mahmood 2008, Horrie and Chippindale 2013). What is new, this essay contends, is the wholesale and deliberate mugging of the sphere of public discourse, so that “fake news” is both a descriptor and a term of abuse by those who peddle it (Trump, 2017, passim). Journalism educators, then, need not only to uphold the ethical imperative to transmit fair, balanced and accurate information, but also to teach students how to uncover and challenge these perversions of truth.

Post truth definition: frameworks

“What is truth? said jesting Pilate and did not stay for an answer,” wrote Francis Bacon in the 17th century. He went on to write “But it is not only the difficulty and labour which men take in finding out of truth, nor again that when it is found it imposeth upon men’s thoughts, that doth bring lies in favour; but a natural though corrupt love of the lie itself.” (Bacon, nd)

Fake news is all over the news. On 15 May 2017 a discussion on R4 Today (BBC 2017) linked right-wing journalist Matthew d’Ancona’s book Post-Truth with BBC presenter Evan Davis’ book Post Truth, while James Ball of the centre-left Guardian weighed in with Post-truth: How Bullshit conquered the World. Post-truth is by these authors seen as a descendant of post-modernism, an intellectual movement loosely based on the works of Lyotard, Foucault, Derrida (Norris 2014) and Baudrillard. Key formulations include: “Reality is unrepresentable (Lyotard 1984)”; that information is never pure and isolated but always inscribed in structures of power (Foucault 1979); and that “The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth--it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true. (Baudrillard 1988)”.
It is attractive to see such gnomic utterances as intellectual progenitors of fake news. But look at ambassador Hoekstra denying on camera that he had ever said that the Netherlands had no-go areas, and calling it fake news. He is then shown the clip of him saying it. Whereupon he says that he never said the phrase “fake news” -- only to be confronted by the TV clip of that very utterance (Belam 2017). Honestly, can such dunderheadedness be traced to Derrida’s juggling with deconstructing truth within semantics (Norris 2014)? Can we blame French philosophers for Alex Jones of Infowars advocating that Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton are literally demons from hell (Beauchamp 2016)?

And do we need, along with the historian Jackson Lears (2018), to conclude despairingly that “a spreading confusion envelops everything”?

What constitutes fake news? And how does it affect our longstanding classroom commitment to teaching news values?

First of all, what is it not?

There are three common ways to dismiss the problem of fake news:

1 Fake news is no news at all

This is used to mean – nothing to see here, move along.

Such a dismissal may well be true in the sense that fake news conveys no reliable information. Trump’s account of mass rapes in Sweden in February 2017 falls into this category (FactCheck 2017). But was Trump conveying information or doing something else? And how was his speech received?

The post-truth evangelists have prophesied correctly in that we now live in a post-modern world, where competing narratives and interpretations vie for legitimacy. It is not enough to say “it’s on the news/BBC/Prime Minister says so”. Many millions of consumers do believe in what we term fake news. An anecdote may show why.

One of our students was convinced that the “deep state” was actively interfering with his computer. This deep state was controlled by the Rothschilds (who else?). As a Jew, I found this particularly offensive. But the student was at pains to assure me that it was nothing to do with anti-Semitism, despite the hooknosed misers in the accompanying cartoons. It was very hard to unpick his commitment to this utter bullshit (pardon this expression, see below), since what really lay beneath it seemed to be his belief that he (and all of us) were mere miserable puppets in an evil game of world domination played by a scheming elite. I don’t entirely disagree with this analysis – does anyone? I simply disagreed that the deep state had urged his dog to destroy his assignments.

One can dismiss such ideas as deluded bunkum. But, to quote Princeton philosopher Harry Frankfurt On Bullshit (2005), “As conscious beings, we exist only in response to other things, and we cannot know ourselves at all without knowing them.” Fake news means something to many, many people, so I suggest that as educators we need to take it into account and counter it with the deadly slow work of unpicking facts. For example, present other competing theories and introduce real journalists who can talk about their news gathering processes, applying what Frankfurt (2005) calls “sceptical dissolution”.

2 Fake news is not new

It is certainly no news that deliberate lies have long been the currency of some news organisations. A recent “unauthorised biography of the Daily Mail” (Addison 2017) not to mention screeds of submissions to Leveson (2011), from Richard Peppiatt’s account of his work at the Daily Star right down to the measured responses of AJE’s Professor Chris Frost, testify to the fact that some news organisations have consistently been, in Chris Horrie’s phrase, “sticking it up their punters”. The Fake Sheikh (Mahmood 2008, BBC 2016) and, infamously, Kelvin MacKenzie’s editing of the Sun during the Hillsborough disaster (BBC 2012) are just notable examples of the blags, scams and fabrications which have characterised the “gutter press” ever since Sir Walter Scott said journalism was a suitable profession for a “thorough-going blackguard” – and even before (Aspinall 1945).

Propaganda from the state is not new either. There has been thorough going censorship and misinformation as in the Soviet Union: No pravda in Izvestia, no izvestia in Pravda, as the saying went (no truth in the news,
no news in the truth) (Amos 2017). Government press output in the lead up to the Iraq War has been shown to be propaganda by an analysis of the Chilcot Report (Robinson 2016).

Yes, indeed, fakery is NOT new.

What does seem different now is the defence. Not “No, I never, I didn’t, guv” (The standard libel defence) or “It’s a fair cop” (see Mahmood’s defence or the quietly amusing corrections pages, buried on pages 34-96), but the bare-faced, “So what? This is true in another sense.” Until recently, perhaps Kelvin MacKenzie’s defence of his infamous The Truth headline comes nearest to this: he demanded that the police apologise to him for giving him inaccurate information (Telegraph 2012).

Here are two egregious examples of this refusal to conform to any norms of truth-telling.

Alex Jones of Infowars said the following (Walters 2017).

“Megyn Kelly is a puppet,” he said in an online broadcast in which he also compared the newscaster to the gorgon Medusa. “She is a beautiful woman that the corporate structure uses to push its agenda. We have the whole interview documented so that we can post mortem and see where she edited and where she manipulated.”

His release of the tape of the pre-interview conversation with Kelly, he said, was an example of “ground-breaking journalism [that] shows the anatomy of an NBC-CIA-globalist-George Soros-financed hit job”. The tape, needless to say, shows no such thing. Interestingly, reporter Walters goes on to note that Jones then promoted a line of organic toiletries, sales of which help fund his operations.

Boris Johnson has made a whole career out of such unashamed lying. As Gimson (2017) wrote on Conservative Home:

“In recent times, only one Brussels correspondent has made his name by cutting through the pious guff and telling his readers what was actually going on, namely that the European Commission was grabbing more power for itself at the expense of the nation states.

He hugely annoyed his rivals, who had allowed themselves to become trapped in a more reverent attitude to European institutions, and were understandably annoyed by his willingness to treat journalism as a creative art, in which in order to convey larger truths, and catch his readers’ attention, he did not scruple to embroilder his material. He is now the British Foreign Secretary.”

Johnson’s fabrications about the EU have been ably detailed by Hemke (2017) (see her article on page ): he has never apologised or retracted any of them, even though the EU has a whole website dedicated to busting Euromyths (EC 2017).

How then to deal with the shamelessness and reversal? This is where those continental philosophers do have a part to play. It is not enough in the classroom to point out errors. We as educators need also to ask the age-old question: cui bono? Whom does this lie benefit? Why hold to it? Our answers in discussion may point beyond the obvious, wellworn answers of political bias and patronage and deeper -- to the desire to maintain power by corrupting discourse, a la Foucault; to the need for a pure public sphere to democracy to function, as Habermas has it; and to the ruthless rearrangement of lived reality, as explored in the fictions of Kafka, Orwell and Bulgakov, for instance. In this case, such literary devices as reading of fictions, drama and simulations have a part to play in the journalism classroom.

3 Fake news is too fake to bother about.

Not so. The Wild West of the Internet is where most people under 30 and many under 40 get their news these days. It may be untrue, in the sense of it never happened, but just like the fable of Chicken Licken, who goes to see the king because he wrongly thinks that the sky is falling in and gets tricked into being eaten by a fox, its consequences may be all too real.

Let’s not get too excited about the waning influence of the Sun, Mail and Express in elections. If you haven’t looked at Breitbart and the Canary and Evolve and InfoWars and so on, you don’t know what the majority of people are looking at. Links widely shared on social media zap around the world before the truth blinks, let alone gets its boots on. The left wing Skwawkbox can launch a hate campaign aimed at “Blairite” MP Jess Phillips based on a complete lie and flood social media with hateful tweets and images. Right-wing Guido Fawkes can enlist thousands in denouncing resigning minister Lord Adonis as barmy, on the basis of an entirely reasoned letter. And anyone can take a pop at experts of any kind and get a hearing, They call this the echo chamber.

One current favourite (January 2018) is the woman from Tennessee who has carried on an argument with a research marine biologist on whether prehistoric shark magalodon survives. His explanation – that if it did,
whales could not have evolved to be so big – is trashed in her eyes by her insistence that she does not care about his research because she saw “on a video somewhere” that the “government does not want us to know the truth” – “just as it did when it exterminated the freakin’ mermaids”.

How does fake news flourish? Intention and context

Kahnemann and Tversky (1996) have amply demonstrated the power of cognitive bias, at least equal to that of political bias. The so-called echo chamber effect of social media has blended the two, often most effectively at the edges of political opinion, as shown in research by, for example, Krasodomski Jones for Demos, analysing 2,000 tweets (2017). Such bias drives much social media content, distorts reports of events and when it does not outright fabricate, shades every story with outrage or derision.

Examples can be found on the right and on the left. They quickly snowball. Marantz (2017) details how a wilful misinterpretation of a hypothesis by academic Cass Sunstein has snowballed to the extent that people on social media routinely cite him as a government shill out to prevent free speech (aka conspiracy theories), along with much far-right material.

In June 2017, a picture of David Cameron drinking coffee juxtaposed with the Grenfell Tower was trending, with the Canary-devised heading “Look what Cameron was doing while the Tower burned” (Mendoza 2017). Inaccurately – the picture was years old. Tendentiously – Cameron is not now in public life. Foolishly – was he supposed to get out his hose and dash down there? But cleverly – this felt right to Canary’s writers and readers; Cameron had declared he wanted to kill off safety culture. Cognitive bias did the rest.

How prescient was Stephen Colbert in his brilliant comedy bit about the word “truthiness” (Colbert 2005) which culminates with “Other folk promise to read the news to you. I promise to feel the news AT you.”

As educators, how do we challenge such amplification of cognitive biases? Good old-fashioned Socratic dialogue, with a lot of patience, in the short term. But in the long term, a dispassionate look at the shortcomings of the MSM is overdue.

So, what is going on? And how can the tired paradigm of news values deal with it?

Space forbids me to go too deeply into the well-trodden theory of news values. As we all know there is a reading list, at the very least including

Galtung and Ruge 1965;
Harcup and O’Neill – most recently 2016;
Brighton and Foy 2007;
and so on – an excellent bibliography can be found in Harcup and O’Neill’s 2016 honourable recension.

News values, according to these writers, is a narratological, pragmatic account of how news is gathered and stories constructed, with a tight methodology of sampling. Harcup and O’Neill end their analysis of 711 printed news stories in a week in November 2014, top 10 Facebook stories and top tweeted 15 Twitter stories -- by saying a story is newsworthy because “sometimes it just is”. I suggest that this statement falls flat in the face of teaching fake news and what it means for journalism in the future.

Harcup and O’Neill also agree that their taxonomy is not a list of alternatives, that stories can fall into several categories, and that selection is as important as content.

Classic challenges to the news values approach include those from the left – for example, writers like Stuart Hall (1997) on bias and stereotypes, Stanley Cohen (2003) on the media as promoting moral panics, Chomsky (1995) on the manufacturing of consent and bias conscious and unconscious, Bourdieu on the closed narratives and personnel of newsrooms (a field dominated by those with the required cultural capital, to use his words).
Other challenges, most honourably outlined in Harcup and O’Neill (2016), have criticised the limits of looking only at a narrow band of news media, of looking only at news media although news is omnipresent in other media, and of ignoring broader social currents like the expansion of technology, growing affluence, changing reading patterns of the audience or audiences, targeting audiences, the importance of images, reduced budgets and the internal politics of newsrooms.

On top of this, and crucially for journalism educators, the main problem with the taxonomic, narratological approach is that it assumes good faith on the part of journalists and news organisations.

But why should we assume this?

Fake news, bad faith and the MSM

Journalists, as opposed to journalism educators, don’t. Nick Cohen (2017) wrote:

“Ball explains how the economics of the web is destroying the possibility of financing serious news and raising the question of whether readers want a cautious fact-checked article when it is cheaper and much more profitable to follow Breitbart, the Express or the Canary and whack out clickbait, which is anything but “boorring”.”

Harcup and O’Neill nod to this in their 2016 conclusion: “who is selecting news, for whom, in what medium and by what means (and available resources) may well be as important as whatever news values may or may not be inherent in any news story.”

I want to suggest that there is no “may” about it – that these mechanisms are the precondition and determinants for any news story and hence explode any notion of inherent and professional, disinterested news values. More than that, the echo chamber and consequent playing to cognitive biases of the audience, dictate and distort not only the news that is published but also the news that is gathered.

There are then, challenges to the usefulness of an innate hierarchy of news values which can be ideological or pragmatic.

Working with students, we should not necessarily believe the traditional, news values, accounts of how the MSM functions to produce news: ideologically there are many opposing views. Within this framework of narrative competing for fickle audiences, what is the role of journalism education and what kind of journalists are we trying to turn out? These ideological challenges need unpicking.

Secondly, and crucially, in the multi-vocal, social media-stimulated world, the public no longer accept the primacy of MSM news. Pragmatically, there are alternatives everywhere. To news values -- but also to news. This can be trivial – famously BuzzFeed began by tweeting skateboarding cats. It may be that the public would rather see skateboarding cats than accounts of a nuclear disaster – now they can.

News no longer is, to use the post-modern term, a privileged narrative. Not even for journalism students. News in all organisations is flailing to find relevant values and audiences: traditional outlets commonly use social media as news sources and testimony. Kim Kardashian’s bottom famously “broke the internet”, according even to the staid Telegraph magazine (Sadghani 2014).

Harcup and O’Neill cite a German study which found audiences less keen on social significance than journalists. But we don't need a study to tell us this – we have our students. Ask your students who read a newspaper in the last week, who watched TV news, who heard the Today programme. Then ask who they follow on Instagram. American singer Selena Gomez was top in 2017, with 130 million followers (Hartmans 2017), topping a poll of celebrities, sports people and musicians.

However, this is not the whole story. Alerntive media can be more substantive, as in Evolve’s breaking of the 2017 Tory manifesto scrapping the ban on ivory trading (Winterbottom 2017) just before the 2017 UK general election. This garnered at least 60,000 retweets and may have affected voting patterns. Where journos shook their heads and asked, “Why is this news?” young people were energised and angered.

For increasing numbers of people, it is the mainstream media that publishes stories in bad faith.

If news itself is in a bad way, what are our remedies? What price news values when the definition of news is contested? Why don’t audiences seem to care if some “content producers” as the jargon has it, are knowingly producing completely false material?

Organisations like First Draft, the British Full Fact and the American Snopes, work hard to correct erroneous facts. And they are useful correctives to share with students. But facts are only half – and the less
Fake news is about interpretations, which as the earlier section on philosophers indicated, are now seen as up for grabs. Even if we do not share Nick Cohen’s pessimism, this could spell the death of traditional honest reporting. Cohen (2017) says that “There are no facts, only interpretations” inevitably leads to the conclusion: ‘The reason of the strongest is always the best.’ And hence leads to fascism. This line of reasoning leads us to Trump and his hyperactive Twitter feed and churning press office.”

Trump, as Claire Wardle of blog First Draft said on BBC R4 Today (2017) has “weaponised fake news”. He is not the first to do so. But the fact that the most powerful man in the world has espoused this method of communication means that dismissing it is not an option, as conservative commentator Andrew Sullivan remarked on BBC Radio 4 news (2017). Before Trump was President, it was possible for commentators to dismiss his shady business dealings and obfuscations as “total bullshit” (Goldstone 2013) – for example in his bogus, never operated Trump University. That now seems less and less fruitful, since the purpose of Trump’s social media is to alter reality, as Gessen (2017) writes: “Trump tweets blatant lies, repeatedly, to show that he can—and that by virtue of his bully pulpit, his words, however absurd, always have consequences.”

Still, one option with students is to rely on tried and tested “sword of truth” options and unpick and probe data, assertions and evidence – to promote the sterling values of honest reporting as against bad faith and deception. We can challenge the assumption of Lears (2018) that “The rush to publish without sufficient attention to accuracy has become the new normal in journalism.”

We can also avoid getting carried away so that we think no one believes any news media any more. Gessen (2018) reports on a large American study that shows only a small percentage of people (around 10 per cent), and specifically those already marginalised, are convinced by false and inflated news stories. He concludes, rather grimly, that research offers “proof that accurate reporting still matters—sort of”.

**Honest reporting? The issue of trust**

Still, looking at those retractions buried inside many newspapers, we may concede a point. Undoubtedly, the pressures of economics have squeezed the time and money for traditional honest reporting. What has happened to that traditional honest reporting?

If we turn to Grenfell Tower as one of the two major tragedies to strike the UK in 2017 (the other being the Manchester Arena bombing), a striking and consistent feature is how reviled the media have been. As Claire Wardle said: “You believe whom you trust” (2017).

Distrust of the MSM is now at least as powerful as the embrace of fake news (Katz 2017). The reasons for this go much deeper than the excesses, well documented in Leveson and touched on here. The systemic and deep rooted reasons were well stated by Bourdieu (1989): “Media is a closed conversation.”

By this he means that journalists look in the same places always for information, that by class position and by training they do not see other sources of information, AND that poor people only feature in news as perpetrators and victims of crime, or as freak shows. As McKendrick et al wrote (2008): “Coverage of poverty is peripheral in mainstream UK media. The causes of poverty and the consequences of poverty were rarely explored.

Non-news broadcasts rarely mentioned poverty, although they often featured those experiencing deprivation. Coverage tended to focus on extreme cases, highlighting the inherent ‘failings’ of undeserving people.”

All three of these factors were thrown sharply into relief in the debacle of the Grenfell Tower tragedy.

**Grenfell Tower: case study**

A little background: In 2009, the Lakanal House fire killed 6 and the coroner recommended that sprinklers be installed in all tower blocks. This was widely reported, but the lack of subsequent action was not (Khan 2017).

The cladding, which declared as combustible after the Grenfell Tower fire, is banned in the USA and rated as flammable in Germany, its manufacturers say (Tamplin 2017). In 1991 and 1999 similar fires led to the
House of Commons hearing Fire Safety officers call for it to be banned in 2000 -- Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs - the Government department which was then presided over by John Prescott (Parliament 2000).

In 2011, the Chartered Institute of Housing (CiH 2011) highlighted concerns over fire safety in public housing.

In 2014 in Australia (Wahlquist 2014), in 2015 and 2017 in Dubai (Henderson and Graham 2017), very similar fires engulfed tall buildings with similar cladding, but no loss of life – fire rescue was more effective for the rich of Dubai than the poor of west London, as the Grenfell tenants action group has pointed out (2017). Not least because sprinklers were fitted.

Even before the work began in 2011 the Grenfell Action Group said it had continually warned the council about fire safety problems in the block, complaining that it seemed the contract had been “awarded to the cheapest bidder regardless of the quality of works and the consequences to residents.”

Last November the group (Grenfell Action Group, passim) warned of “dangerous living conditions” and said: “It is a truly terrifying thought but the Grenfell Action Group firmly believe that only a catastrophic event will expose the ineptitude and incompetence of our landlord, the KCTMO.”

In April 2016, The Building Research Establishment (BRE 2016), which works for the Department of Communities and Local Government on fire investigations, reported that attempts to innovate with insulation were leading to an “increase in the volume of potentially combustible materials being applied” to buildings.

But until June 14, you would scarcely know any of this if you solely consumed the MSM. The tenants tried in vain to get publicity. They were poor. Their voices were not “sexy” unless they were: Shock! Horror! illegal immigrants or benefit fraudsters. As McKendrick et al wrote (2008) “A key limitation of media coverage is the tendency to marginalise accounts which confront negative public attitudes.”

The tenants got slapped with a writ by the council instead – but persisted. It is hard to shut down a blog, but easy to shut off the MSM, most obviously by withdrawing advertising. There is nothing polished about the blog, but for that reason, it rings true to its readers.

The story was not covered in the MSM – it didn’t fit in the closed conversation and wasn’t worth any risk.

Inside Housing, the excellent trade mag of the social housing sector, has published numerous articles on fire safety (Inside Housing nd). But industrial correspondents have vanished from the newsrooms. No one picked the story up - - not even London’s evening paper. And of course, economics mean that MSM has limited resources, particularly local papers – but social media is everywhere.

After the fact, journalist Patrick Sawer wrote: “There is growing evidence that the rush by private firms to fulfil council contracts as cheaply as possible led to less expensive cladding being used that was not as fire resistant (2017).”

That “growing” evidence has been in plain sight all along.

So, let us throw the question back at students. Who should the public trust? Is it so irrational to despise the MSM? Why don’t they make more use of tools like Freedom of Information requests? If journalists are not doing their job of newsgathering, why should we accept their news values?

Heather Brooke (2017) sums up eloquently:

“The company that manages Grenfell Tower is a nonprofit that is, in theory, run by and for residents of the thousands of buildings it manages in London. But only eight of the 15 board members are residents (the other seven are council appointed or independent), while repairs and maintenance are contracted out to another private company. The council, the ultimate owner of these buildings, has a close relationship with the management company, which the Grenfell Action Group sees as an unresponsive buffer. Residents’ concerns, the group says, have consistently been ignored and suppressed.

The English system of local government is hard to navigate, and opportunities for citizens to engage meaningfully with decision makers are not plentiful. A paternalistic “we know best” attitude often prevails, and even basic information is available only through freedom-of-information requests. Until 2005, when the Freedom of Information Act came into force, it was illegal to disclose fire inspection reports to the public. Even today, those reports can be obtained only by written request under the freedom-of-information law. In another sign of this “trust authority” mind-set, official instructions to Grenfell residents were to “stay put” in the event of a fire. Fortunately, most people ignored that and fled.

These are turbulent times in Britain, and the fire at Grenfell Tower touches on many of the issues that are riling people. Over the past decade, a series of events have demolished the trust citizens once had in of-
ficialdom: the financial crash of 2008, the scandal of parliamentary expenses and the chaos in government following the Brexit referendum.

Although digital technology, through blogs and social media, has created new ways for citizens like those of the Grenfell Action Group to represent their rights and interests, the traditional way of doing politics looks more archaic and undemocratic than ever. The question is always, Who has the right to know? Truly empowered individuals don’t have to wait passively to receive what information officials choose to give them. They can ask their own questions — and get answers.”

For politics, substitute news media. And so we come to the conclusion.

**Conclusion**

People embrace fake news because they feel that they don’t see real news in the news. They tend not to trust the mainstream media (MSM). They trust each other and so trust what is spread via social media. Thus they can become prey to those of ill faith and evil intent. Yet since they may see their own cognitive biases reflected in lies, they will be less inclined to challenge those lies than the truth. However, these effects may operate more at the margins than hyper-excited commentators may think (Gessen 2018).

So in teaching an apparently neutral concept like news values, journalism educators should not duck the twofold challenge to traditional journalism which fake news has exposed. Both the information gap between people’s lives and what they see in the media and the brazen steadfastness of proponents of fake news must be addressed.

News media also has to step up to what Habermas declared to be its role – to mediate between power and the people. Not to exert power on the people. Until it does, we will all be swamped with a lot more truthiness – and God knows where those freakin’ mermaids will have gone.

**Ways forward**

As educators we need to take fake news into account and counter it with the deadly slow work of unpicking facts. For example, present other competing theories and introduce real journalists who can talk about their news gathering processes, applying what Frankfurt (2005) calls “sceptical dissolution”.

We need also to ask the age-old question: cui bono? Whom does this lie benefit? Why hold to it? Our answers in discussion may point to the desire to maintain power by corrupting discourse, a la Foucault; to the need for a pure public sphere to democracy to function, as Habermas has it; and to the ruthless rearrangement of lived reality, as explored in the fictions of Kafka, Orwell and Bulgakov, for instance. In this case, such literary devices as reading of fictions, drama and simulations have a part to play.

How do we challenge such amplification of cognitive biases? Good old-fashioned Socratic dialogue, with a lot of patience, in the short term. But in the long term, a dispassionate look at the shortcomings of the MSM is overdue.

Perhaps most importantly, we, in the media and in journalism education, need to tackle the excluded, the hidden, the silenced voices and experiences.

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Journalism: A New World Order – Brexit, Trump, the Media (and the 2017 UK General Election)

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Brexit, Trump and the Media (Abramis, 2017) edited by John Mair, Tor Clark, Neil Fowler, Raymond Snoddy and Richard Tait, brought together the input of more than 50 authors, mostly journalists and academics, but some of them direct participants, on the political upheavals of 2016, the 2017 UK General Election and the changing role of the news media.

What follows is a selection of some of the most interesting and useful insight and analysis from among those 50 contributors, all taken from their chapters in the book, and from the contemporary and subsequent discussions of the five editors during the planning of the book and at its launch in July 2017, just after the first anniversary of Brexit.

Background – Seismic changes in 2016/2017

The rise of populism presented a challenge to journalism. In the UK the EU Referendum presented new kind of political contest at odds with traditional political journalism. In the US, candidate Donald Trump profoundly altered the media landscape with his campaign, then cemented that change in his presidency. Excitement was generated by revolt against the establishment on both continents. Journalism aided those social movements by reporting, misreporting or not reporting them at all. So how do these two seismic changes alter journalism’s ‘world order’?

Brexit, Trump and the General Election: Issues for the media

In the UK the 2016 EU Referendum surprised traditional print journalism because it was a very evenly-matched binary contest, rather than the multi-party general election campaign political journalists were used to. One common finding among political journalists was where in the past some media participants could be seen as ‘neutral’ in multi-party elections, in the Referendum, there was a tendency to label them as either Remain or Leave. The respected independent financial think-tank the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) was a good example of this. Whereas in normal day-to-day politics its independent views were respected by all sides and it was not considered partisan, despite being scrupulously neutral in the Referendum, it was branded as ‘Remain’ simply because it suggested leaving the EU would be bad for the UK economy. It quickly became clear in a fight between two sides, it was difficult for organisations to avoid being branded as partisan by one side or the other.

Newspapers had a traditional role to play in the EU Referendum, as they do in elections, but while newspapers’ direct influence on election results has clearly waned from its highpoint of 1992 (see Greenslade, 2004), in a contest with a winning margin of less than two per cent, the influence of newspapers may have been more crucial (Clark, 2017).

Perhaps the biggest area of controversy for journalism during the Referendum were issues with the notions of ‘balance’ and ‘due’ impartiality in broadcasting. And across all forms of journalism, the topical issues of ‘Fake News’ and ‘Alternative Facts’ came to the fore. ‘Facts’ – interrogation, challenge and fact-checking