

How a 171-year-old news agency is the hidden mainstay of news on Facebook

By Ian Burrell

Former media editor, the Independent

August 31, 2017

Website: [The Drum.com](http://TheDrum.com)

New research reveals that the bedrock of journalism on Facebook is far more stable than one might have thought of a news environment stigmatised by rampant clickbait and fake stories.

It turns out that the biggest provider of stories by far on the world's biggest social media platform is the world's oldest news agency, Associated Press.

A study by news analytics company NewsWhip found that the AP – set up in 1846 by a group of New York dailies to provide coverage of the Mexican-American War – is generating almost 35m engagements a month on Facebook, a fact disguised by the agency's comparative anonymity, masked by the brands of its members and clients in the news industry. This huge number of engagements (likes, comments etc) can't be matched by any single news publisher, even the phenomenal Mail Online, which currently leads the chasing pack with 27m interactions.

The AP's most popular content is its breaking news, its political coverage, and its celebrity and "odd" stories.

In an interview with The Drum, the AP's global news manager Mark Davies admits that the scale of AP's contribution to news on Facebook came as a surprise, even to him. "I had a gut feeling that we would be somewhere in the top 20 but we were quite

surprised to see that actually we came out as number one,” he says. “I think it’s very reassuring that very accurate, unbiased reporting is still driving engagement and obviously stimulating debate on social platforms.”

In the midst of the fake news debate, and fears that voters are being misled by lies and propaganda masquerading as journalism, these are significant findings. But the picture is more nuanced than the comforting idea that Facebook users are largely basing their opinions on facts professionally compiled by a venerable news wire with an adherence to balanced reporting.

Virtues meet virality

Patterns of news consumption are in flux.

Headlines have never been as important as they are now in this mobile-first media era, and every client of the AP can create its own alluring title for the same agency article. Thus a piece on a new book about millennials that carried the original AP headline “New book urges parents to reorder life for the sake of the kids” was repositioned by the Miami Herald publisher, McClatchy Group, to the more judgmental “Why kids today are out of shape, disrespectful – and in charge.” The revised headline was a viral hit, earning 330,000 social interactions across McClatchy’s portfolio of titles.

AP understands that this is how contemporary audiences engage with news. The agency, while maintaining its age-old reporting practices, is determined to respond quickly to changes in news consumption by investing heavily in data analytics and automated news gathering.

Social media is inevitably affecting the way that publishers behave in selecting stories from AP’s wire. News editors will be drawn to headlines that suggest a piece will be widely shared and drive traffic numbers. So AP, which is primarily a B2B business, increasingly tinkers with its own headlines to grab the attention of the professional journalists in its client base.

Thus, the rather staid “At Afghanistan’s brick kilns, debt can last generations”, was transformed into “Brick workers enslaved for life as Afghan warlords profit”. The result was a 114% uplift in customer use of the story. Similarly, an immigration story originally headlined “Identifying body No. 421, pulled from migrant shipwreck”, had a 102% increase in customer use after being given the catchier title “Shipwreck CSI: Identifying the victims of the migrant crisis”.

But Davies says that the agency remains mindful not to oversell its journalism with exaggerated headlines. “We will never be in the business of clickbait and we are very strict about that,” he says. “If we can see a way of making a headline more engaging, or doing something that works on mobile - because so much consumption now is on mobile and you don’t get a second chance with a headline - it’s got to be clear and it’s got to be concise and that’s where we are always looking at making improvements.”

AP operates from 263 bureau locations in 106 countries. It claims that half the world’s population sees its content every day. These days it is also a consumer-facing news publisher with 14.8m downloads of its news apps and 1.38bn page views of its content last year. It also scored 2.6bn views of its video content, which is of growing importance. AP made 47% of its revenue from television clients last year, and 10% from digital native publishers, with a relatively small 23% coming from its traditional newspaper customer base.

Davies says that it has long used Teletrax analytics to monitor the “story arc” of how customers and audiences engage with its video content and that the NewsWhip data is enabling it to apply similar tests to written stories.

Data is shaping disaster reporting

One of the key findings to emerge from this “qualitative approach” to studying content use is that audience engagement with big disaster stories is not as enduring as it used to be. The immediacy of news in a social media environment means that users quickly digest the initial facts and then expect the narrative to move on. This understanding is having a significant effect on how AP allocates resources to a big breaking story. “The interest in a story drops off far more rapidly than we perhaps expected,” says Davies. “When there is a major breaking story you throw a lot of resources at it but we could actually see in some cases it was smart to pull resources out because interest in the story was dropping quicker than we thought.”

I’m sure that AP’s response to Hurricane Harvey’s flooding of Houston, will have included an immediate decision to plan for third day coverage of the disaster by focusing on the human interest angles which Davies says audiences now crave on stories ranging from natural disasters to major terrorist incidents. “From day three onwards... the interest switches to the more human elements, be it those affected by the incident or [us] telling the story of the incident through the eyes of one or two players. We have actually seen the shifting interest and that allows us to cover the story better for our customers.”

This provision of “compelling human reporting and personal stories” remains part of AP’s neutral approach to the news, Davies argues. “People can relate to those stories particularly when it helps them to make their own viewpoint on an issue - we are not giving them opinion, we are giving them the facts.”

The recent white supremacist march in Charlottesville, Virginia, provoked waves of media coverage, from traditional news outlets and partisan websites alike. A separate NewsWhip study of engagements on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Pinterest, found that the Charlottesville news story that provoked the most social media interactions was a Chicago Tribune piece lifted directly from the AP wire and carrying the original AP headline: “Trump blames ‘many sides’ after violent white supremacist rally in Virginia”. (Only one piece from outside the mainstream media, a viral blog from Republican commentator Allen B. West, out-performed that Tribune article).

Of course, AP’s clients often don’t stick to the original headlines. News publishers have long been accustomed to taking agency copy and presenting it in a way that suits their political agendas. Davies warns that there are strict limitations on this. “We have a broad range of customers and, within our terms of use, they cannot distort or misquote our reporting, and if we do see instances of that we will definitely follow it up with the publisher,” he says.

The AP produces a lot of news. The NewsWhip study found that AP’s 30m-plus monthly Facebook engagements were coming from between 1.25m-1.35m content matches detected each month. Two-thirds of the Top 10 Facebook publishers are AP members or clients.

But, as Davies points out, the AP is only one of several major global news agencies, all of which are now generating journalism intended for social media. “When you think of Reuters, AFP (Agence France Press) and Bloomberg, all out there with very big operations, I think that if you could survey the overall impact of news agencies on engagement on social platforms around the world I think you would come up with an exponentially larger figure,” he says.

“That really would be eye opening.”

Ian Burrell's column, The News Business, is published on The Drum each Thursday. Follow Ian on Twitter @iburrell

8



Who or what are you searching for?...

You are here > Home > News & Events > Company News > Sally Buzbee: Media must call out facts

Sally Buzbee: Media must call out facts

Published: 9/15/2017 Last Updated: 9/19/2017

At the International Broadcasting Convention conference in Amsterdam, Executive Editor Sally Buzbee commented on current challenges faced by news organizations – from fake news to fighting for access – and the role of artificial intelligence in reporting.

During the session titled “Lies, damn lies and alternative facts: Striving for accuracy in a new world order,”

Sally S Buzbee addressed a range of topics, including President Donald Trump’s tweets.

“There have been tweets that say China is creating a hoax about climate change, and Obama ordering a wiretap – these need to be called out as having no factual basis,” Buzbee said. “It’s very dangerous territory if the media does not call out what is factual.”



AP Executive Editor Sally Buzbee, right, speaks with moderator Paul Robinson during a session at the IBC conference in Amsterdam, Sept. 14, 2017. (Photo courtesy IBC)

AP has long done some of the most thorough fact-checking in the news industry, and last year began working with Facebook to knock down false stories trending on the social network.

“The accessibility of information and speed that information travels now make it possible for people to be in the conversation and just throw information out there,” said Buzbee of the proliferation of fake news.

Buzbee also spoke about the role of technology in journalism, explaining how artificial intelligence has the potential to help journalists with deeper, fact-based reporting:

That could be something as simple as sorting through reams of data to find a campaign finance story or report more deeply on pollution, for example. It helps us with fact checking, too, and vetting user-generated content.

There is a ton of opportunity for us to tell deeper and more fact-checked stories with AI. But it's important that it is in no way substitute for journalists. It's potentially a fantastic tool for journalists to deepen their work, not a cost-cutting measure.

A replay of Buzbee's IBC remarks is available [here](#).

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The New York Times

U.S.

Oops. Bob Hope Is Not Dead.

By DAVID STOUT JUNE 6, 1998

When Representative Bob Stump announced the death of Bob Hope today, he felt a sense of personal loss. Mr. Stump, an Arizona Republican, was a homesick teen-ager in the Pacific in World War II when the comedian lifted his spirits with his stand-up routine.

So Mr. Stump was greatly relieved to learn, only minutes after his announcement, that Mr. Hope, who turned 95 on May 29, was very much alive.

The Associated Press said it had caused the misunderstanding by inadvertently displaying an advance obituary of Mr. Hope on its Web site. Representative Dick Armey of Texas, the House Republican leader, saw the obituary and handed it to Mr. Stump, asking him to announce the death on the House floor.

Mr. Stump was an obvious choice, since he had introduced the bill that made Mr. Hope an honorary veteran. Many troops from World War II to the Persian Gulf war recall Mr. Hope's appearances. Mr. Stump closed his tribute with, "We're all going to miss him."

ABC Radio reported the "death," citing Mr. Stump's speech, but then broadcast a denial from a spokesman for Mr. Hope, said Eileen Murphy, an ABC spokeswoman.

News organizations that reached the California home of Mr. Hope were told by his daughter Linda that he was enjoying his breakfast. Mr. Armey apologized on the House floor.

Mr. Stump, who was a Navy medic, called Mr. Hope "the best friend anyone in uniform ever had." Mr. Stump said he had spoken to Mr. Hope's daughter and was relieved to find her "not the least bit upset."

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BC-US--People-Tom Petty,7th Ld-Writethru/327

Eds: Revises headlines and summary. Removes outdated material. With AP Photos.

Initial erroneous Tom Petty death reports cause confusion

SANDY COHEN, AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — For several hours Monday, music lovers believed Tom Petty was dead.

Courtney Love, Talib Kweli, Kid Rock, Cyndi Lauper, Paul Stanley and Lin-Manuel Miranda were among scores of fans posting remembrances on Twitter, where Petty was the top worldwide trending topic Monday afternoon. A memorial was scheduled for his star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

But the 66-year-old entertainer was still alive at the time, and news outlets that announced his death Monday were forced to retract their stories. The Walk of Fame tribute was canceled.

The reports, as it turned out, were merely premature. Petty's publicist confirmed late Monday that the rocker died at 8:40 p.m. after having suffered cardiac arrest.

The unusual chain of events led some to quip online that Petty went out in true rock star fashion — by dying twice in one day.

The confusion started with CBS News and the Los Angeles Police Department. CBS published Petty's obituary after tweeting that the LAPD had confirmed his death. The trade paper Variety followed, citing an unnamed source confirming the rocker's death.

Then the LAPD issued a statement saying it has no information on Petty's condition and that "initial information was inadvertently provided to some media sources."

"We apologize for any inconvenience in this reporting," the department said.

CBS and Variety amended their stories. CBS News also released a statement maintaining that it "reported information obtained officially from the LAPD about Tom Petty."

"The LAPD later said it was not in a position to confirm information about the singer," the statement said.

An LAPD spokesman said in an interview Monday that its spokespeople did not respond to any incident involving Petty. Officer Tony Im said he could not rule out that someone in the department spoke to reporters, but said the LAPD has no investigative role in the matter.

Follow AP Entertainment Writer Sandy Cohen at www.twitter.com/APSandy .

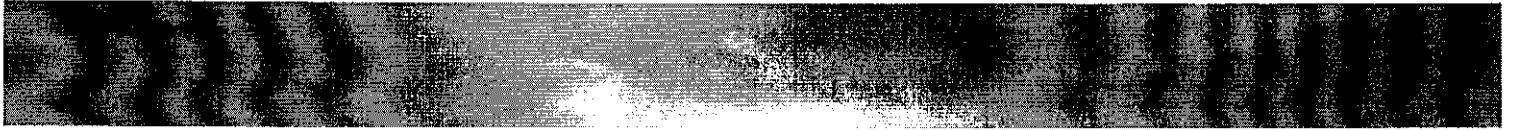
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Summary

Date: 10/3/2017 3:13 AM

Slug: BC-US--People-Tom Petty,7th Ld-Writethru

Headline: Initial erroneous Tom Petty death reports cause confusion



Donna Blankinship ●
@dgblankinship

Following ▾

Thank you, @AP, for not killing off people before they are dead. Love the way The Associated Press waits for actual confirmation.

Juliet Williams ● @JWilliamsAP

With all the other sadness to deal with, at least Tom Petty's not dead. Wait for actual confirmation, folks. apnews.com/9c732220ea144f...

3:23 PM - 2 Oct 2017

7 Retweets 19 Likes



19



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KNIGHT FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES MAJOR TRUST, MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY INITIATIVE TO BUILD A STRONGER FUTURE FOR JOURNALISM

SEPTEMBER 25, 2017

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Seven projects focused on improving trust in journalism, increasing news engagement to receive \$2.5 million

MIAMI – Sept. 25, 2017 – The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation today announced a major initiative to support the role of strong, trusted journalism as essential to a healthy democracy.

The initiative is anchored by the Knight Commission on Trust, Media and Democracy, a panel of thinkers and doers from diverse backgrounds committed to creating more informed and engaged communities. This nonpartisan commission (participants list below) will explore causes for the erosion of trust in democratic institutions, in particular the press. It will also identify new thinking and solutions around rebuilding trust.

The Knight Commission will be chaired by Jamie Woodson, executive chairman and CEO of Tennessee's State Collaborative on Reforming Education, and Tony Marx, president of The New York Public Library, the largest public library in the nation and the most used library system in the world. It will be run by the Aspen Institute, with \$2 million in support from Knight.

The initiative also includes the Knight Prototype Fund, which fosters accurate information in media and announced a new round of winners in June 2017, and Newsmatch, a partnership with Democracy Fund to support nonprofit news and investigative news outlets with matching grants during the end-of-year giving period; Newsmatch was initially launched by Knight in December 2016. Knight plans to build on the initiative further with the help of the commission and other partners.

"Internet is potentially the greatest democratizing tool in history, but it is also democracy's greatest challenge," said Alberto Ibarguen, Knight Foundation president. "By offering access to information that can support any position and confirm any bias, internet has eroded trust in the everyday facts we once shared. This initiative aims to help society grapple with that challenge. Based on the way humanity has grappled with similar disruptions in the past, I'm optimistic."

Combining big picture thinking with immediate action, the initiative also features more than \$2.5 million in new funding to seven projects aimed at improving trust in news and building stronger connections between journalists and their audiences.

"The challenges posed by rising mistrust in media and the rampant spread of misinformation in the digital age raise urgent concerns about the future of journalism. These projects aim to bring communities and journalists closer together, and help create long-term solutions to the problem of misinformation," said Jennifer Preston, Knight Foundation vice president for journalism.

The projects include:

Cortico | \$900,000 | Twitter: corticoAI | Cambridge, Massachusetts: The 2016 election underscored the need to better listen to the voices of people who have gone unheard, to tell their stories and to develop a deeper understanding of a public sphere fragmented by digital technologies and political polarization. Cortico, a new nonprofit led by Deb Roy of the Laboratory for Social Machines at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, will build a platform to address these issues, helping newsrooms surface and tell stories that resonate across this fragmented landscape to foster trust,

empathy and common ground. Building on its expertise in social media analytics, Cortico will extend its platform to include multiple data sources (national news, syndicated/local talk radio, local news/forums, Wikipedia, survey panels) and to incorporate content and conversations at a local level.

Duke University Reporters' Lab | \$800,000 | Twitter: @ReportersLab | Durham, North Carolina: The Duke University Reporters' Lab will launch the Duke Tech & Check Cooperative, an innovation hub designed to expand the network of organizations building fact-checking tools for journalists and the public. The Lab will develop and deploy new tools to help journalists find and identify claims made by public figures and analyze their accuracy. In addition, the project team will expand the Share the Facts database to develop new apps that provide consumers with live fact-checking. The Lab will also track automation projects focused on addressing misinformation around the world, and host regular meetups, webinars and an annual Tech & Check meeting to connect innovators working in this growing field. The lab also announced additional funding from Facebook today.

President and Fellows of Harvard College | \$250,000 | Twitter: @shorensteinctr | Cambridge, Massachusetts: Funding will support First Draft, a research and learning lab now a part of the Shorenstein Center for Media, Politics and Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School. The network includes more than 100 organizations to help newsrooms, academics, fact-checkers and technology companies collaborate and encourage real-time verification of news events. The lab will increase support and training for the news industry by building a team of researchers and graduate students who will track and test different ways of responding to misinformation. It will develop online resources for students, newsrooms and citizens to recognize and combat misinformation.

Associated Press | \$245,000 | Twitter: @AP | New York: Funding will help increase the news organization's ability to debunk misinformation by doubling its resources from two to four full-time staff dedicated to fact-checking. The Associated Press will work with its member news organizations and customers (more than 15,000 news outlets) to integrate local news fact-checks into its consumer-facing platforms for the first time. They will use data and automation and experiment with new storytelling formats to better understand the kinds of information people trust. Associated Press members and customers will get access to training on best practices for fact-checks through the organization's Definitive Source webinar. They will also experiment with building trust on the local level by providing training, best practices and support for at least one local or regional fact-checking project.

Reynolds Journalism Institute | \$100,000 | Twitter: [@rji](#) and [@mayerjoy](#) | Columbia, Missouri: Support will help grow the institute's Trusting News project, which develops news engagement experiments and trains journalists on ways to increase trust with their audiences. The project, directed by Joy Mayer, relies on audience feedback and uses in-depth research to design news innovations. It has already helped hundreds of journalists in 44 newsrooms across the country. Knight funding will help it expand to more news organizations and create a training program for journalists focused on concrete strategies to identify audience preferences and finding new ways to connect. Learn more and apply to get involved at [TrustingNews.org](#).

Markkula Center for Applied Ethics | \$100,000 | Twitter: [@journethics](#), [@_trustproject](#) | Santa Clara, California: The center's Trust Project is developing open-source software toolkits to help newsrooms convey their commitment to ethics, independence and inclusive, accurate reporting to the public. The toolkits will include content management system plug-ins for eight trust indicators (i.e. best practices, type of work, author/producer info) that provide visual cues and clear information to help people assess fact-based digital news and sort it from misinformation. The tools will also provide curators of digital journalism like Google and Facebook with consistent signals via associated metatags in [Schema.org](#). The Trust Project is partnering with newsrooms large and small to create and test the plug-ins and other software to support both the user experience and data layer behind the trust indicators.

Jefferson Center | \$75,000 | Twitter: [@JeffersonCtr](#), [@YourVoiceOhio](#) | St. Paul, Minnesota: The Center's Your Voice Ohio project will help strengthen connections between local newsrooms and their communities in Akron, Ohio and other news organizations across Ohio. It will advance experiments in engaged journalism, an emerging field that examines the changing relationship between news providers and consumers, and explores new ways to attract audience attention. Participating newsrooms will test and adapt approaches to better serve their communities, determining the best fit with their newsrooms. Lessons in engaged journalism will be hosted on the Knight-funded platform, Gather, housed at the University of Oregon's Center for Journalism Innovation and Civic Engagement. The center also announced additional funding from Democracy Fund today.

The first meeting of the Knight Commission on Trust, Media and Democracy will be held on Oct. 12 at New York Public Library; they will be meeting in locations across the country during the next year. Commissioners come from a range of backgrounds and expertise, and their work will last just over a year. Complementing the commission's plan to engage the community in solution building, Ibargüen is

in Detroit this week to engage with media professionals and community members on the future of local news.

Knight has formed influential commissions in the past. The Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy met in 2008-2009 and produced a report that helped shape Federal Communications Commission policy on broadband internet access. Formed in 1989, the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics has been the leading voice for the interests of student-athletes in major university athletics programs. Both of those commissions were also run by the Aspen Institute, a nonpartisan forum for values-based leadership and the exchange of ideas.

The commission members include: **Co-Chairs:** Tony Marx, President, The New York Public Library; Jamie Woodson, executive chairman and CEO State Collaborative On Reforming Education; **Commissioners:** Raney Aronson-Rath, executive producer, FRONTLINE PBS; Meredith Artley, senior vice president and editor-in-chief, CNN Digital; Perry Chen, founder and chairman, Kickstarter; Nonny De La Peña, founder and CEO, Emblematic Group; Richard Edelman, CEO, Edelman Public Relations; Francis Fukuyama, Olivier Nomellini senior fellow and Mosbacher director, Center for Democracy, Development and Rule of Law Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University; Theaster Gates, founder, Rebuild Foundation; Richard Gingras, vice president, news, Google; Sean Gourley, CEO, Primer; Amy Gutmann, president, University of Pennsylvania; Shani Hilton, head of US news, BuzzFeed; Alberto Ibargüen, president, Knight Foundation; Walter Isaacson, president and CEO, The Aspen Institute; Fisk Johnson, executive chairman and CEO, S.C. Johnson; Joanne Lipman, chief content officer, Gannett and editor-in-chief, USA TODAY; Nuala O'Connor, president and CEO, Center for Democracy & Technology; Eduardo Padrón, president, Miami Dade College; Eduardo Peñalver, Allan R. Tessler Dean and Professor of Law, Cornell Law School; Deb Roy, director, Laboratory for Social Machines and professor of media arts and sciences, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Media Lab; Chris Ruddy, founder, NewsMax; John Thornton, founder, Texas Tribune; Anthea Watson Strong, product manager for news, Facebook; Charlie Sykes, political commentator; Jonathan Zittrain, faculty director, Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society Harvard University.


About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

Knight Foundation is a national foundation with strong local roots. We invest in journalism, in the arts, and in the success of cities where brothers John S. and James L. Knight once published newspapers. Our goal is to foster informed and engaged communities, which we believe are essential for a healthy democracy. For more, visit knightfoundation.org.


About the Aspen Institute

The Aspen Institute is an educational and policy studies organization based in Washington, DC. Its mission is to foster leadership based on enduring values and to provide a nonpartisan venue for dealing with critical issues. The Institute is based in Washington, DC; Aspen, Colorado; and on the Wye River on Maryland's Eastern Shore. It also has offices in New York City and an international network of partners. For more information, visit www.aspeninstitute.org.

Contact: Anusha Alikhan, Director of Communications, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, 305-908-2646, media@knightfoundation.org

EXTERNAL CONTENT / WEBSITE 

Learn more about the Knight Commission on Media, Trust and Democracy

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Register to join the Oct. 12 commission kick-off meeting in NYC

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Share Your Passion

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I taught my 5th-graders how to spot fake news. Now they won't stop fact-checking me.

It's more important than ever to teach kids how to read news critically.

Updated by Scott Bedley | Mar 29, 2017, 11:30am EDT



Students in Auckland, New Zealand work in their classroom in May, 2016. | Fiona Goodall/Getty Images

FIRST PERSON

Vox's home for compelling, provocative narrative essays.

It was a fall day in 2014, and my classroom was full of excitement. My students had transformed themselves into historical figures for a living history project. I was going to broadcast it online so other schools could watch our "Age of Exploration News Conference" live.

One half of the class researched and dressed up as European explorers like Christopher Columbus. The other half acted as news reporters from all the major outlets ready with questions. It was my attempt to bring history to life.

Andy stepped to the mic. Several classes from across America were watching live online. It must have felt like millions of people to a fifth-grader.

Andy was acting as Ferdinand Magellan, the first person traditionally credited with circumnavigating the globe. He stood up tall and leaned into the mic ready to face the media.

"Are there any questions?" Andy, as Ferdinand Magellan, asked the group of energized 10-year-old "reporters." One quickly got his attention with a loud request.

"Yes, what are you famous for and when did you do much of your exploration?" asked one of my student reporters.

"Well, I am famous for sailing around the world in 1972."

The class started to laugh. To Andy's credit, he bounced back from the laughter and the clear embarrassment he felt and finished his news conference strong.

I pulled Andy aside later and asked where he had found the information.

"I Googled it," he said.

He had been researching online and felt so confident that his answer was accurate. I felt horrible. I had let him down by not teaching him how to test the reliability of a source.

The need to teach students how to vet information is only more urgent now, in the age of "fake news." A recent **study** showed that on social media, fake news, defined as deliberately falsified news articles created to drive clicks, was shared over 35 million times during our most recent election cycle.

I've spent 23 years teaching in a Southern California classroom, and we're seeing a true bubble of false information online. Here's how I've adapted my curriculum and teaching style to make sure my students know which sources to trust — and which to reject.

I was determined to change the way I help my students critically analyze the information they were finding on the internet

To make sure I wouldn't have any student in the same situation as Andy ever again, I started asking my students to examine seven different elements of a news article. If the information checks out on each of these points, it has a high likelihood of being accurate. Still, passing the test is not a guarantee that it's fact.

1. **Copyright:** I always ask students to check the bottom of the webpage to see if the information has been submitted for ownership.
2. **Verification with multiple sources:** Students must double check the information on a few different web pages. Like in a trial, the more corroborating witnesses, the more likely the truth will be discovered.
3. **Credibility of source, such as between History.com versus a random unknown source:** I tell them to check if the source has been recently created. Sources that have been around for a while can show reliability over time and be tested by hindsight, whereas recently created sources don't carry much of a track record.

4. **Date published:** I always ask them to check how recently the page was updated to see how current the information is and whether anything has changed.
5. **Author's expertise and background with the subject:** Students should check if the author is someone who has dedicated time and effort to learning this subject. For example, a university professor typically has increased credibility versus a hobbyist.
6. **Does it match your prior knowledge:** I ask them if the information matches up with what they have learned before
7. **Does it seem realistic:** I tell students to use their common sense. Does something seem authentic or probable?

The only problem was that I hadn't developed a way for them to put their new knowledge to the test. Sure, I could give a traditional test, but knowing the large amount of testing my class already has to do, I wasn't willing to add another to their lives.

I had recently started a grassroots effort with a few other educators focused on infusing play back into the lives of children. The program is called **Global School Play Day**. As a big believer in the concept of "play to learn," I wanted to put my students in a situation that allowed them to play with the fake news, and even create some themselves to understand how easy it is to share.

I shifted again with the most recent election cycle to a classroom game

I needed my students to understand that "fake news" is news that is being reported as accurate, but lacks reliability and credibility. A good example are the widely shared stories of the pope **endorsing** one presidential candidate over another. I decided to devise a game, the goal being to tell fake news from real news.

The first place I went to is world renowned for their creation of fake news: the Onion. I knew it would be a simple jumping-off point for finding things my students could research to see if it was fake or true.

We then used a great site for kids called **Newsela.com**, which takes articles from multiple sources and makes them accessible to a variety of reading abilities. This would serve as the real news website. From there, I explained the rules of the game we would play. Then the game was on!

unicef 



Imagine a Simon Says style game where I present an article found on the web on a projector. Students research for two to three minutes, then respond by standing or staying seated to signal if they believe the article is true or fake. My students absolutely loved the game. Some refused to go to recess until I gave them another chance to figure out the next article I had queued.

Simon Says for fake news seemed to hook the kids in, but I wanted to provide a deeper opportunity for understanding so the concept would really stick. The popular gameshow *To Tell The Truth* was a bit before my time, but I had seen enough to understand the idea. On the show, three people would speak to a panel of celebrity experts who would try to figure out who was telling the truth about their identity. The panel of experts was given a chance to do their own research by asking questions. I took the main concept of that show, gave it a twist, and have now landed on our own version.

The Simon Says-style game has morphed now so that we can challenge other classes. Each class has three students on camera using Skype, then reads three news stories. Only one is fake. Students work in teams to see if they can be the first to prove which of the three is the “fake news.” Classes trade turns between sharing the stories and identifying the fake news.

What started out as an in-class learning game has shifted to an online game with classes from anywhere across the United States.

From “Is this true, Mr. Bedley?” to “This Is true, Mr. Bedley!”

The kids really enjoyed the fake news stories. It gave them something to laugh, talk, and debate about. But the game has also led to a class discussion on whether we should support sources that share fake news. There were several references to the tabloid magazines sold near the checkout register in the grocery store. Ultimately, my students expressed the importance of being able to identify which news is fake and how this content can be used to manipulate them and their decisions.

The challenge for my students comes back to understanding the difference between someone who is sharing their opinion and someone who is creating news that is meant to mislead, either as clickbait or to influence those who don't take the time to verify accuracy. We talk about how facts can be verified, whereas opinions typically can be supported with evidence, but are far more debatable and take a position within the debate. Now that my

students have a greater understanding of fake news, our new game for the end of the year will be “Fake or Opinion” instead of “Fact or Opinion.”

It's interesting what you overhear as a teacher. We hear a lot, and this election cycle had more of my 10- and 11-year-old students talking politics with each other than any other year I've taught during a presidential election cycle. Through those conversations, I could hear fear, confusion, and misunderstandings. It was one of the reasons I needed to encourage my students to read and learn more on their own, which turned me back to the question of how they identify misinformation and fake news and ultimately to the learning game I created for them.

I set out to help my students read news more critically, and I feel that these games have shifted the way my students approach online content every day. Time will only tell if this lasts beyond my classroom, but the early impact outcomes are very positive. One unintended consequence is that I now have 33 10-year-old fact-checkers in my classroom that I've empowered to call me out if I'm sharing fake news.

Confession: I still love to slip fake news in about the content we are studying to keep sharpening their skills.

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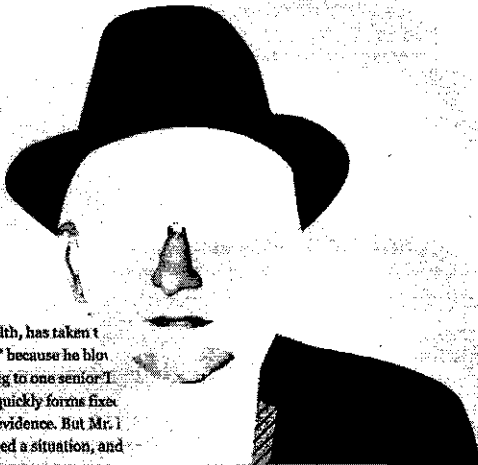


When To Trust A Story That Uses Unnamed Sources

By Perry Bacon Jr.

Filed under The Media

Published Jul. 18, 2017




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The various investigations into the Trump administration and its alleged ties to Russia are hard to follow. The allegations are sometimes muddled, the probes are still ongoing, and all sides in the dispute are leaking information that favors their points of view. These stories are also hard to follow because few officials are willing to put their names behind their claims and comments, leading to a stream of stories rife with unnamed sources.

What's a reader to do? Well, here's a guide to unnamed sources in government/politics/Washington stories — who they are, how reporters use them, and how to tell if you should trust what they say. Having covered Congress, the White House, several presidential campaigns and briefly the Education and State departments, I have begged (usually unsuccessfully) many sources to allow me to use their names, written a fair number of stories with unnamed sources, and spent a lot of time trying to decode stories with unnamed sources written by other journalists. For this piece, I also consulted other journalists and political types who have served in senior staff roles on campaigns, on Capitol Hill and in presidential administrations.

This is part one of two. I'll cover some general principles for reading anonymously sourced stories here and break down the different types of such sources in part two. I wrote this piece because of all the Trump-Russia stories, but the rules, terms and designations apply to other Washington stories as well.

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This is not a story meant to condone or encourage the use of unnamed sources. While President Trump and his defenders have bashed the use of anonymous sources, some journalists themselves also say the practice is overused. They argue that using unnamed sources limits journalistic accountability, since readers and other reporters can't easily check the accuracy of an account if they don't know where it comes from. Unnamed sources are often a feature of stories that I would argue are more about reporters showing how savvy and in the know they are than truly informing and enlightening readers.

But major investigative stories, both in Washington and outside of it, are often impossible to write without unnamed sources. The alternative to stories with unnamed sources is often not having the story published at all, rather than the same story with names. Sources have a wide range of motives for not going public. Some reasons are noble (whistleblowers may face retribution for leaking details to a reporter). Some are not (White House aides, both in the Trump administration and previous ones, sometimes don't like one another and complain anonymously about their colleagues to the press).

Either way, there are many news outlets and often very few people who know the details of White House deliberations or the state of the Russia investigation. So the sources have the power to set the terms with the journalists, and one of those terms is often, "don't use my name."

5 tips for reading stories with unnamed sources

1. Multiple sources add up.

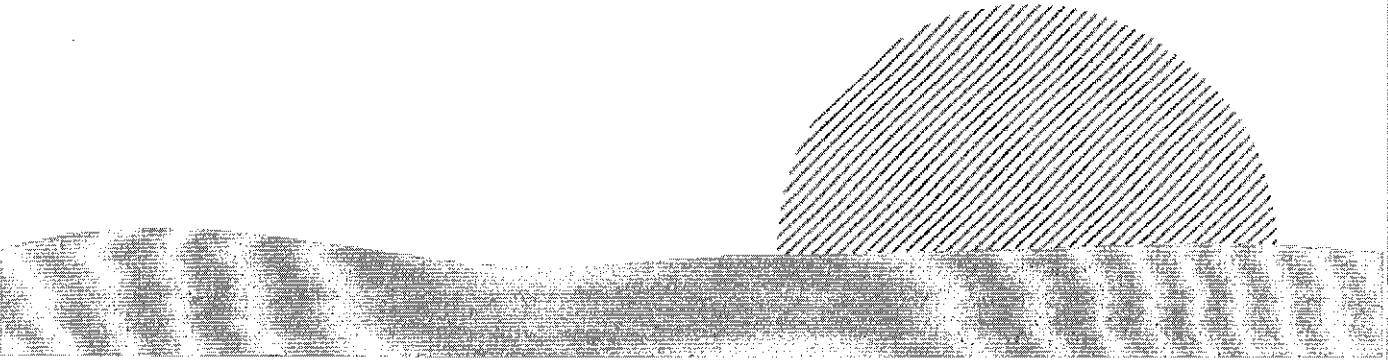


When an outlet says “six White House officials” or “seven Department of Justice officials,” it’s providing a level of precision that makes me more likely to trust the story. This does not necessarily mean that the story is correct. But it does suggest it was thoroughly reported.

A recent New York Times story, for example, described something top White House adviser Jared Kushner was saying in private meetings, according to “six West Wing aides.” Six people are less likely to be wrong than one — and this also indicates that the reporter was cautious and diligent enough to seek confirmation with more than one person. CNN’s recently retracted report that Congress was looking into a Russian investment firm with potential ties to people in Trumpworld, meanwhile, cited only a single anonymous source.

And, obviously, if multiple reputable news organizations or reporters report out and confirm the same story (not just link to another outlet’s reporting), that’s a reason to assume it is accurate. Conversely, if another major publication is casting doubts on a story you read that quotes lots of unnamed sources, that should heighten your skepticism. For example, In the Iraq War era, even as The New York Times and other outlets often echoed the Bush administration’s assertion that Iraq possessed large numbers of weapons of mass destruction, there were publications like McClatchy that were more skeptical of the government’s claims.

2. Unverifiable predictions are suspicious.



Trust a source who says something happened; distrust a source who says something *might* happen.

Axios and Politico, two publications targeted at political junkies, in particular often float “scoops” predicting that something will happen that never does. An April piece in Axios quoted “aides and advisers” to Trump who suggested that White House chief of staff Reince Priebus and chief strategist Steve Bannon could soon be pushed out by Trump, with House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy potentially replacing Priebus. This would have been a huge shift of power on both Capitol Hill and in the White House and more than three months later has not happened. As early as February, Politico highlighted the potential of a broad shake-up of White House officials that included Priebus. Politico recently suggested that Priebus would be out of his job around July 4; that didn’t happen. The story was carefully hedged, of course, noting that Trump might not follow through on the idea of dumping his chief of staff.

I’m more dubious of stories that claim insider knowledge about future events, for three reasons.

First, they are almost impossible to disprove in any way. In the Priebus example, the reporter or news outlet (Politico) can always claim that Trump intended to fire his chief of staff around July 4 but then changed his mind.

A second concern, related to the first, is that the nebulous nature of these speculative stories creates an incentive for reporters to write them. If Trump had fired his chief of staff on July 3 or July 5, Politico would have looked very prescient. The firing did not happen, and the reporter can claim that Trump just didn’t follow through without suffering any loss of credibility. This kind of story “gives [the journalist] a provocative scoop that cannot be readily disproven, since it purports to reflect someone’s state of

mind, which can always change, as opposed to an actual thing that has occurred,” said Brian Fallon, a Democrat who has served in top communications roles on Capitol Hill, as well as for the Department of Justice and Hillary Clinton’s 2016 presidential campaign.

Stories like these often get tons of buzz and attention, but reporters (both those who write these pieces and those who read them) know these stories are often just speculation. I’m not sure readers do.

Thirdly, sources have an incentive to encourage these kinds of speculative stories. If you are someone in the White House who does not like Priebus or you want to take his job, anonymously leaking that Trump is considering replacing Priebus is a great tactic. Trump did not publicly commit to keeping Priebus on, and now you (the Priebus rival) have put in the minds of everyone in Washington that the White House chief of staff is on notice. “In instances like these, the anonymous report serves the source’s interests,” Fallon said. “It allows them to float a trial balloon without being accountable for it.”

On the other hand, I would be more likely to trust a piece reporting, even with unnamed sources, that Trump was considering sending 20,000 troops to Syria. Why? Because the stakes for this claim are much higher. Staffers leave administrations all the time, while the U.S. does not as regularly deploy thousands of troops abroad.

3. Specifics matter.

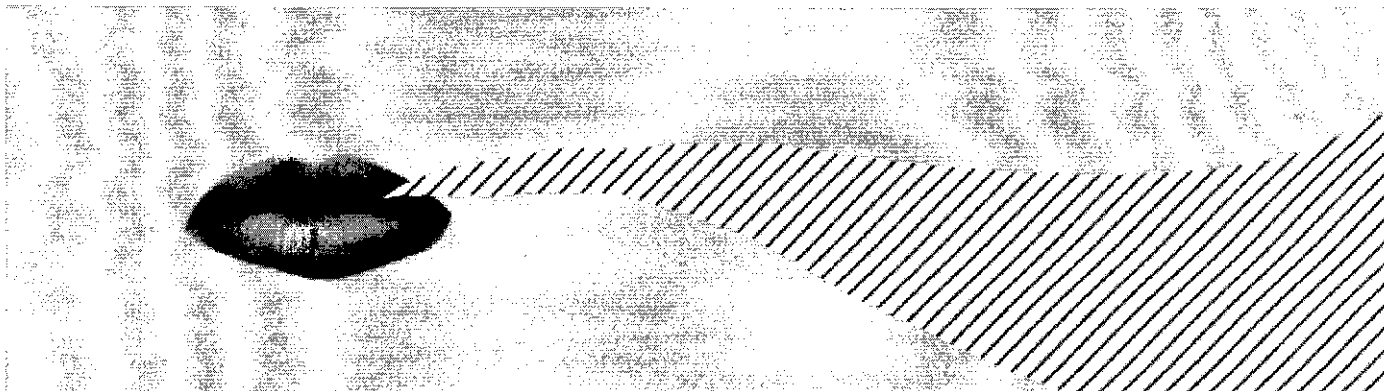


What information does the story give you about its sources? The more, the better. For example, trust “Department of Justice officials” more than “administration officials.” If a story includes claims from unnamed officials from the Justice Department, those

claims are typically run by the department's press office. I would interpret a story sourced to "Department of Justice officials" without a denial from the press team there to be accurate — and perhaps even leaked by the department's press team itself. An "administration official," on the other hand, covers a much bigger group of people with disparate interests and points of view. It's easy for other reporters to call the Justice Department and verify the story, while it's much harder to confirm a story attributed to administration officials, which could mean any agency or the White House.

Then there are the descriptions of anonymous sources that essentially tell you nothing. A recent Washington Post story cited "U.S. officials briefed on intelligence reports" — that could be almost anyone. Or, worse still: "people familiar with the investigation." Broadly speaking, you, dear reader, are "familiar with the investigation" — you're reading about it after all.

4. Consider the outlet and the reporters.



If, say, Nate Silver, Harry Enten and I co-write a story with unnamed sources about Hillary Clinton's campaign decisions in 2016, there are reasons for readers to trust that story. All three of us have long records covering electoral politics. If the three of us wrote an article claiming that Kushner had a secret meeting with a Russian oligarch, full of unnamed sources, you should be more skeptical, since we are not regularly breaking news about Kushner's activities.

There are valid reasons to question the practices of the "establishment media," but at least for now, I'm more comfortable with stories using unnamed sources, particularly about major national security or intelligence issues, that come from outlets and reporters who have a history of covering these issues, such as The Wall Street Journal,

The New York Times and The Washington Post. (And, yes, I'm fully aware of the big blunders of the major papers and networks, such as CNN's bungled Russia report.)

"Certain reporters have well-deserved reputations for being careful and not getting it wrong," Fallon said. "Think Pete Williams at NBC in a breaking news situation when there is a major law-enforcement story."

The big outlets also have another advantage in terms of unnamed sources: Important people come to them. If a tiny blog or a reporter you've never heard of breaks a story on some kind of major White House policy shift, one reason to be skeptical is that most administrations would rather leak big news to the Times or the Post than a more obscure publication.

"Top aides on campaigns or highly connected sources inside the law-enforcement community are just not spending a lot of time trusting some partisan blog or smaller digital outlet with sensitive information," said Kevin Madden, a Republican who has served in senior press roles on Capitol Hill, in the Justice Department and on Mitt Romney's presidential campaigns.

5. Watch for vague or imprecise "denials" of these kinds of stories. That often means they are accurate.



Another thing to make you trust a story: When an official spokesperson offers a "denial" that really isn't a denial. Remember when the Post published a story in May, vaguely attributed to "current and former U.S. officials," suggesting that Trump had disclosed "highly classified information" in a meeting with Russian officials? Responding to the story, national security adviser H.R. McMaster told the paper, "At no time were any intelligence sources or methods discussed, and no military

operations were disclosed that were not already known publicly.” But the story had not actually claimed that the president had disclosed sources, methods or operations — only information, which McMaster did not deny. (Trump essentially confirmed that he had disclosed the information soon after the story ran.)

“If the person implicated in the report is unable to outright deny it, that’s a sign it can be trusted, even if the sources are anonymous,” Fallon said.

In conclusion, we think you should continue to read stories with unnamed sources, but carefully and cautiously. Even major outlets like CNN and The New York Times occasionally get things wrong when relying on unnamed sources. On the other hand, this article and its follow-up should help you understand why everyone in Washington knew that in February, then-national security adviser Michael Flynn was in deep trouble. He was accused of something that either happened or did not — a factual claim (talking on the phone with the Russian ambassador to the U.S. and discussing sanctions imposed by the U.S. against Russia) — in a story in a traditionally reliable outlet (The Washington Post) that was written by reporters known for covering national security and intelligence issues (Greg Miller, Adam Entous and Ellen Nakashima), with multiple unnamed sources making the claim (“nine current and former officials”).

A Flynn spokesman, asked to comment on the story, told the Post that Flynn “indicated that while he had no recollection of discussing sanctions, he couldn’t be certain that the topic never came up.” That response was well short of, “no, sanctions were not discussed.”

Flynn resigned from his job within a week.

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Unbelievable news? Read it again and you might think it's true

December 5, 2016 9.25pm EST

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In the weeks since the U.S. election, concerns have been raised about the prominence and popularity of false news stories spread on platforms such as Facebook. A BuzzFeed analysis found that the top 20 false election stories generated more shares, likes, reactions and comments than the top 20 election stories from major news organizations in the months immediately preceding the election. For example, the fake article “Pope Francis Shocks World, Endorses Donald Trump for President, Releases Statement” was engaged with 960,000 times in the three months prior to the election.

Facebook has discounted the analysis, saying that these top stories are only a tiny fraction of the content people are exposed to on the site. In fact, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has said, “Personally I think the idea that fake news on Facebook, which is a very small amount of the content, influenced the election in any way – I think is a pretty crazy idea.” However, psychological science suggests that exposure to false news would have an impact on people’s opinions and beliefs. It may not have changed the outcome of the election, but false news stories almost definitely affected people’s opinions of the candidates.

Psychological research, including my own, shows that repeated exposure to false information can change people’s beliefs that is it true. This phenomenon is called the “illusory truth effect.”

Author



Lisa Fazio

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This effect happens to us all – including people who know the truth. Our research suggests that even people who knew Pope Francis made no presidential endorsement would be susceptible to believing a “Pope endorses Trump” headline when they had seen it multiple times.

Repetition leads to belief

People think that statements they have heard twice are more true than those they have encountered only once. That is, simply repeating false information makes it seem more true.

In a typical study, participants read a series of true statements (“French horn players get cash bonuses to stay in the U.S. Army”) and false ones (“Zachary Taylor was the first president to die in office”) and rate how interesting they find each sentence. Then, they are presented with a number of statements and asked to rate how true each one is. This second round includes both the statements from the first round and entirely new statements, both true and false. The outcome: Participants reliably rate the repeated statements as being more true than the new statements.

In a recent study, I and other researchers found that this effect is not limited to obscure or unknown statements, like those about French horn players and Zachary Taylor. Repetition can also bolster belief in statements that contradict participants’ prior knowledge.

For example, even among people who can identify the skirt that Scottish men wear as a kilt, the statement “A sari is the skirt that Scottish men wear” is rated as more true when it is read twice versus only once. On a six-point scale, the participants’ truth ratings increased by half a point when the known falsehoods were repeated. The statements were still rated as false, but participants were much less certain, rating the statements as “possibly false” rather than closer to “probably false.”

This means that having relevant prior knowledge does not protect people from the illusory truth effect. Repeated information feels more true, even if it goes against what you already know.

Even debunking could make things worse

Facebook is looking at ways to combat fake news on the site, but some of the proposed solutions are unlikely to fix the problem. According to a Facebook post by Zuckerberg, the site is considering labeling stories that have been flagged as false with a warning message. While this is a commonsense suggestion, and may help to reduce the sharing of false stories, psychological research suggests that it will do little to prevent people from believing that the articles are true.

People tend to remember false information, but forget that it was labeled as false. A 2011 study gave participants statements from sources described as either “reliable” or “unreliable.” Two weeks later, the participants were asked to rate the truth of several statements – the reliable and unreliable



‘Just the place for a Snark! I have said it thrice: What I tell you three times is true.’ Henry Holiday illustration accompanying ‘The Hunting of the Snark’ by Lewis Carroll, 1931.

statements from before, and new statements as well. They tended to rate the repeated statements as more true, even if they were originally labeled as unreliable.

This can also apply to reporting about false public statements. Even a debunking-focused headline like CNN's "Trump falsely claims 'millions of people who voted illegally' cost him popular vote" can reinforce the falsehood Trump was spreading.

Correcting after the fact doesn't help much

When media outlets publish articles that contain factual errors – or that make assertions that are later proved false – they print corrections or retractions. But when people have strong preconceptions, after-the-fact updates often have no effect on their beliefs, even when they remember the information has been retracted.

In the early days of the second Iraq war, many news events were initially presented as true and then retracted. Examples included allegations that Iraqis captured U.S. and allied soldiers as prisoners of war and then executed them, in violation of the Geneva Conventions.

In 2005, cognitive psychologist Stephan Lewandowsky gave Americans and Germans statements about various news events during the war. Some of the statements were true; others were reported as true, but later retracted; still others were false – though those labels were not provided to the study participants.

The participants were then asked to rate whether they remembered the news event, whether they thought it was true or false, and whether the information had been retracted after its initial publication. Participants were also asked how much they agreed with official statements about the causes of the Iraq war.

Americans who remembered reports that had been retracted, and who remembered the retractions, still rated those items just as true as accurate reports that had not been retracted. German participants rated the retracted events as less true. In responding to other questions in the study, the Americans had shown themselves to be less suspicious of the official justifications for the war than the Germans were.

The researchers concluded that the Germans' suspicions made them more likely to adjust their beliefs when the information was retracted. Americans, more likely to believe the war was justified, were also less likely to change their beliefs as new information arrived.

The study suggests that Clinton supporters, who tend to be suspicious of positive information about Trump, may remember that the pope-endorsement story was false, and discount the information. Trump supporters, by contrast, would be left with a more positive opinion of Trump, even if they remembered that the story was false.

There is no easy solution to the problem of fake news. But it's clear that it is a problem: Exposure to false news stories can affect readers' beliefs and opinions. Simply labeling the information as false is unlikely to reduce this effect.

A true solution would somehow limit the spread of these fake stories, preventing people from seeing them in the first place. A first step that each of us can take is to check our sources and not share unreliable articles on social media, even if they affirm our beliefs.



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