

## THE PERCEIVED ACCURACY OF FAKE NEWS: MECHANISMS FACILITATING THE SPREAD OF ALTERNATIVE TRUTHS, THE CRISIS OF INFORMATIONAL OBJECTIVITY, AND THE DECLINE OF TRUST IN JOURNALISTIC NARRATIVES

**GIULIA MASSEY**

massey@aa-er.org

European Center for Economic Performance at CSA, Amsterdam  
(corresponding author)

**JANA KLIESTIKOVA**

jana.kliestikova@fpedas.uniza.sk

Faculty of Operation and Economics of Transport and Communications,  
Department of Economics, University of Zilina, Zilina

**MARIA KOVACOVA**

maria.kovacova@fpedas.uniza.sk

Faculty of Operation and Economics of Transport and Communications,  
Department of Economics, University of Zilina, Zilina

**VICTOR V. DENGOV**

vvdengov@mail.ru

Faculty of Economics, Department of Economics and Economic Policy,  
Saint Petersburg State University, Saint Petersburg

**ABSTRACT.** We inspect the relevant literature on the perceived accuracy of fake news, providing both quantitative evidence on trends and numerous in-depth empirical examples. Using data from Alexa, Edelman, eMarketer, Gallup, Pew Research Center, SNCR, Statista, and Visual Capitalist, we performed analyses and made estimates regarding distribution of traffic sources for fake news in the U.S.A., sources that should take the lead in solving the problem of fake news ads according to U.S. marketers, perceived frequency of online news websites reporting fake news stories in the U.S.A., and extent to which users trust in journalism or platforms for general news and information.

**Keywords:** perceived accuracy; fake news; informational objectivity; trust; journalism

How to cite: Massey, Giulia, Jana Kliestikova, Maria Kovacova, and Victor V. Dengov (2018). "The Perceived Accuracy of Fake News: Mechanisms Facilitating the Spread of Alternative Truths, the Crisis of Informational Objectivity, and the Decline of Trust in Journalistic Narratives," *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations* 10(2): 37–43.

Received 14 March 2018 • Received in revised form 19 July 2018  
Accepted 23 July 2018 • Available online 28 July 2018

## **1. Introduction**

The Internet has curtailed the expense of entry to new participants and subverted the business patterns of established news sources that had been favored with superior degrees of public confidence and validity. Consistent social networks cut down acceptance of alternative opinions, intensify attitudinal polarization (Ariso, 2017; Fabrício, 2016; Mihăilă, 2017; Olssen, 2017; Pera, 2017; Weede, 2016), further the probability of admitting ideologically harmonizing news, and boost obstruction to new information. (Lazer et al., 2018) The Cognitive Reflection Test performance is adversely associated with the perceived veracity of fake news, and positively associated with the capacity to differentiate fake news from real ones, even for headlines connected with readers' political beliefs. (Pennycook and Rand, 2018)

## **2. Literature Review**

Fake news has an elaborately interwoven link with online biased media, both reciprocating and establishing its issue agenda. Evolving news media are somewhat acknowledging the outlines of fake news whose reporting is conflicting (Avram, 2018); Giroux, 2017; Mihăilă and Mateescu, 2017; Popescu, 2017) and becoming more self-governing topically. Fact-checkers are independent in their choice of issues to investigate (Balica, 2017a, b; Gârdan et al., 2018; Mircică, 2017; Otrusinová, 2016; Popescu Ljungholm, 2017a, b, c) but are not effective in setting the news media agenda. Their impact is decreasing (Benedikter, 2016; Havu, 2017; Nica, 2017; Peters, 2017; Regnerova and Regnerova, 2017), demonstrating the obstacles fact-checkers encounter in distributing their corrections. (Vargo, Guo, and Amazeen, 2018) CRT is adversely linked with perceived veracity of rather questionable (mainly fake) headlines, and positively linked with perceived veracity of rather plausible (mainly real) headlines. (Pennycook and Rand, 2018)

## **3. Methodology**

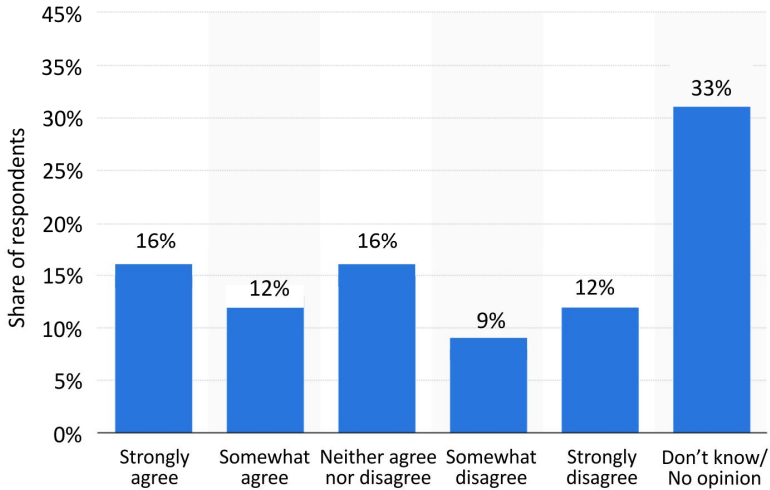
Using data from Alexa, Edelman, eMarketer, Gallup, Pew Research Center, SNCR, Statista, and Visual Capitalist, we performed analyses and made estimates regarding distribution of traffic sources for fake news in the U.S.A., sources that should take the lead in solving the problem of fake news ads according to U.S. marketers, perceived frequency of online news websites reporting fake news stories in the U.S.A., and extent to which users trust in journalism or platforms for general news and information.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

By liking, distributing, and pursuing information (Carter and Chu-May Yeo, 2017; Henderson, 2016; Nica, Potcovaru, and Mircică (Dumitrescu), 2017; Plevný, 2017;

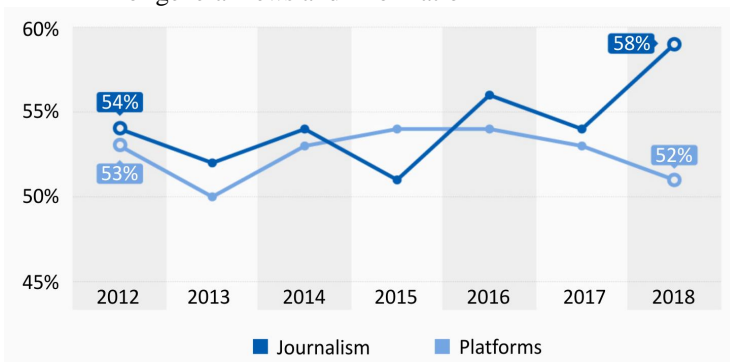
Stroe, 2018), social bots may intensify the sharing of fake news tremendously. (Lazer et al., 2018) Material from fake news websites is escalating, but such platforms do not utilize disproportionate power. (Vargo, Guo, and Amazeen, 2018) The link between CRT and perceived veracity is unconnected to how exactly the headline is associated with the participant’s beliefs. (Pennycook and Rand, 2018) (Figures 1–5, Table 1)

**Figure 1** How much do you agree that newspapers regularly report made-up or fake news about Donald Trump and his administration?



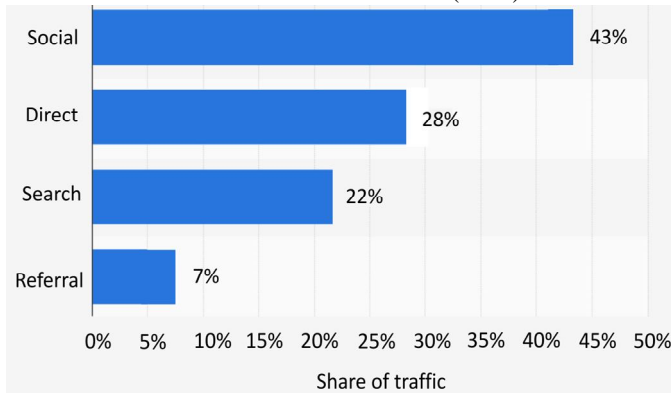
Sources: Statista; our survey among 2,600 individuals conducted December 2017.

**Figure 2** Extent to which users trust in journalism or platforms for general news and information



Sources: Edelman; Statista; our survey among 2,600 individuals conducted December 2017.

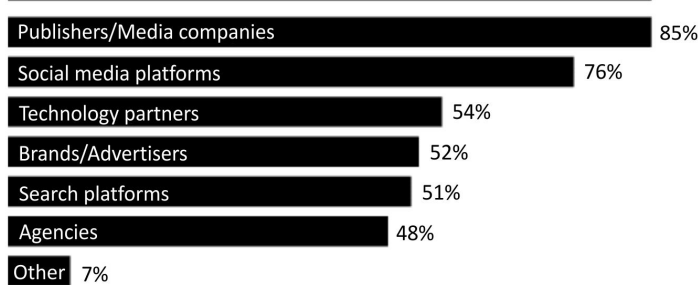
**Figure 3** Distribution of traffic sources for fake news in the United States of America (2018)



Sources: Visual Capitalist; Gallup; Edelman; Alexa; Statista; our estimates.

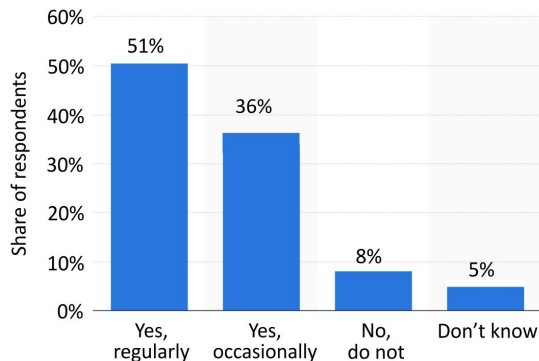
**Figure 4** Sources that should take the lead in solving the problem of fake news ads according to U.S. marketers (March 2018)

*% of respondents*



Sources: Society for New Communications Research of the Conference Board (SNCR); eMarketer; our survey among 2,200 individuals conducted November 2017.

**Figure 5** Perceived frequency of online news websites reporting fake news stories in the United States of America



Sources: Statista; our survey among 3,400 individuals conducted June 2018.

**Table 1** % of U.S. adults who trust the information from

National news organizations			
	A lot	Some	Net
2018	22	53	75
2017	20	52	72
Local news organizations			
2018	28	62	90
2017	25	60	85
Friends and family			
2018	17	62	79
2017	15	61	76

% of web-using U.S. adults who trust the information from

Social media			
	A lot	Some	Net
2018	7	35	42
2017	5	33	38

Sources: Pew Research Center; our survey among 4,100 individuals conducted December 2017.

## 5. Conclusions

Fake news is misleading signals unassociated with the truth. Fake news emerges in equilibrium as it is less expensive to supply inaccurate signals. Readers cannot gratuitously derive truthfulness and may appreciate biased news. Fake news may bring about utility for some readers, but it requires private and social expenses (Donnelly, 2017; Lăzăroiu, 2017; Nordberg, 2017; Popescu, Comănescu, and Manole, 2017) by making it more challenging for them to construe the accurate state of the world. (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017) Populist individuals expect that public belief is in agreement with their own assessment and that mainstream media coverage is unsympathetic toward their own attitudes. There is a breach between adverse media perceptions and harmonizing public belief ones, which amplifies with growing populist positions so that the cogent media inference mechanism is invalidated. (Schulz, Wirth, and Müller, 2018)

### Acknowledgments

This paper was supported by Grant GE-2369511 from the American Association for Economic Research.

### Author Contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication.

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

## REFERENCES

- Allcott, H., and M. Gentzkow (2017). "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 31(2): 211–236.
- Ariso, J. M. (2017). "Unamuno's Mirror-Games: On the Seeming Omnipotence and Meaningfulness of Writing in the Grammatical Void," *Linguistic and Philosophical Investigations* 16: 90–103.
- Avram, A. (2018). "Frontiers of Influence: Language and Technology in the Japanese American Fictions of Etsu I. Sugimoto and Karen Tei Yamashita," *Creativity* 1(1): 81–88.
- Balica, R. (2017a). "The Criminalization of Online Hate Speech: It's Complicated," *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice* 9(2): 184–190.
- Balica, R. (2017b). "The Alienated Language of the Affective Commodity in Houellebecq's Novels," *Review of Contemporary Philosophy* 16: 143–149.
- Benedikter, R. (2016). "Extremism and Ethnicity: A Crucial Interface of Contemporary Geopolitical Strategy to Be Better Addressed by International Policy," *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations* 8(1): 7–29.
- Carter, S., and A. Chu-May Yeo (2017). "From Hedonism and Utilitarianism to Anticipated Actual Behavior: Do UK and Malaysian Postgraduate Students Behave Differently to Mobile Apps?," *Economics, Management, and Financial Markets* 12(2): 11–34.
- Donnelly, R. (2017). "Blended Problem-based Learning in Higher Education: The Intersection of Social Learning and Technology," *Psychosociological Issues in Human Resource Management* 5(2): 25–50.
- Fabrício, B. F. (2016). "Repetition-Differentiation in an Online Debate on Sexualities: Re-Imagining Identity Meanings," *Journal of Research in Gender Studies* 6(1): 241–261.
- Giroux, H. A. (2017). "The Scourge of Illiteracy in Authoritarian Times," *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice* 9(1): 14–27.
- Gârdan, D. A., M. Andronie, I. P. Gârdan, I. E. Andronie, M. Iatagan, and I. Hurloiu (2018). "Bioeconomy Development and Using of Intellectual Capital for the Creation of Competitive Advantages by SMEs in the Field of Biotechnology," *Amfiteatru Economic* 20(49): 647–666.
- Havu, K. (2017). "The EU Digital Single Market from a Consumer Standpoint: How Do Promises Meet Means?," *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice* 9(2): 146–183.
- Henderson, M. (2016). "Bullying Experiences among Sexual Minority Youths in England: The Nature, Prevalence and Association with Life Satisfaction," *Journal of Research in Gender Studies* 6(1): 220–240.
- Lazer, D. M. J., M. A. Baum, Y. Benkler, A. J. Berinsky, K. M. Greenhill, F. Menczer, et al. (2018). "The Science of Fake News," *Science* 359(6380): 1094–1096.
- Lăzăroiu, G. (2017). "The Routine Fabric of Understandable and Contemptible Lies," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 49(6): 573–574.
- Mihăilă, R. (2017). "The Lying Epidemic," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 49(6): 580–581.
- Mihăilă, R., and M. Mateescu (2017). "The Gender Politics of Postfeminist Semantics," *Journal of Research in Gender Studies* 7(1): 255–261.
- Mircică, N. (2017). "The Ethics of Envy on Facebook," *Analysis and Metaphysics* 16: 124–130.

- Nica, E. (2017). "Political Mendacity and Social Trust," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 49(6): 571–572.
- Nica, E., A.-M. Potcovaru, and C.-O. Mirică (Dumitrescu) (2017). "A Question of Trust: Cognitive Capitalism, Digital Reputation Economy, and Online Labor Markets," *Economics, Management, and Financial Markets* 12(3): 64–69.
- Nordberg, D. (2017). "First and Second Drafts of History: The Case of Trump, Foucault and Pre-modern Governance," *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations* 9(2): 107–117.
- Olssen, M. (2017). "Exploring Complexity through Literature: Reframing Foucault's Research Project with Hindsight," *Linguistic and Philosophical Investigations* 16: 80–89.
- Otrusínová, M. (2016). "Public Sector Accounting in the Czech Republic and Slovakia," *Administratie si Management Public* 27: 30–45.
- Pennycook, G., and D. G. Rand (2018). "Lazy, Not Biased: Susceptibility to Partisan Fake News Is Better Explained by Lack of Reasoning than by Motivated Reasoning," *Cognition*. doi:10.1016/j.cognition.2018.06.11
- Pera, A. (2017). "Do Incessant Comparisons on Social Media Generate Facebook Envy?," *Analysis and Metaphysics* 16: 117–123.
- Peters, M. A. (2017). "Disciplinary Technologies and the School in the Epoch of Digital Reason: Revisiting Discipline and Punish after 40 Years," *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice* 9(1): 28–46.
- Plevný, M. (2017). "Influence of the Fare Funding Type on Public Transport Demand – Case of Pilsen," *Administratie si Management Public* 28: 45–66.
- Popescu, G. H., M. Comănescu, and C. Manole (2017). "Mobile Knowledge Work, Information Routines, and Digital Technologies," *Psychosociological Issues in Human Resource Management* 5(2): 187–192.
- Popescu, G. H. (2017). "Is Lying Acceptable Conduct in International Politics?," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 49(6): 575–576.
- Popescu Ljungholm, D. (2017a). "Global Policy Mechanisms, Intergovernmental Power Politics, and Democratic Decision-Making Modes of Transnational Public Administration," *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations* 9(2): 199–205.
- Popescu Ljungholm, D. (2017b). "Performance Appraisal Satisfaction in Organizations," *Review of Contemporary Philosophy* 16: 136–142.
- Popescu Ljungholm, D. (2017c). "Feminist Institutionalism Revisited: The Gendered Features of the Norms, Rules, and Routines Operating within Institutions," *Journal of Research in Gender Studies* 7(1): 248–254.
- Regnerova, O., and M. Regnerova (2017). "Sustainable Development in 'the Light and Shadow' of Globalization," *Ekonomicko-manazerske spektrum* 11(1): 2–12.
- Schulz, A., W. Wirth, and P. Müller (2018). "We Are the People and You Are Fake News: A Social Identity Approach to Populist Citizens' False Consensus and Hostile Media Perceptions," *Communication Research*. doi:10.1177/0093650218794854
- Stroe, M. A. (2018). "Henri Coandă and Constantin Brâncuși: Unveiling the Future," *Creativity* 1(1): 3–80.
- Vargo, C. J., L. Guo, and M. A. Amazeen (2018). "The Agenda-Setting Power of Fake News: A Big Data Analysis of the Online Media Landscape from 2014 to 2016," *New Media & Society* 20(5): 2028–2049.
- Weede, E. (2016). "Geopolitics, Institutions, and Economics: On the Rise and Decline of Civilizations," *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations* 8(1): 177–220.