Holger Pötzsch
UiT The Arctic University of Norway
ORCID 0000-0002-5533-5014

Christina Lentz
UiT The Arctic University of Norway
ORCID 0009-0008-7099-6508

Panoptikum 2024, 32: 133-147 https://doi.org/10.26881/pan.2024.32.09

'The Devil Goes by Many Names': A Critical Examination of Propaganda, PR, and Fake News as Forms of Information *Disorder*

> It isn't the lies they [governments] tell, it's the *quality* of the lies that becomes humiliating.
>
> Arundhati Roy (in Roy & Cusack 2016: 21; emphasis in original)

Introduction

The 2016 U.S. Presidential Election, BREXIT, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine are recent examples of political issues where fake news has been invoked as an explanation for increasing polarization and dissent in liberal democracies (Bergmann 2018; Gradón et al. 2021). These cases are often cited as evidence of the specific threat posed by the deliberate spreading of false

information by populists and demagogues with manipulative intent (e.g. Giusti & Piras 2020). This narrative has been criticized, notably by Farkas & Schou (2019) and Frank (2017), who argue that the real threat to democracy lies among others in the failure of political institutions and important parties to adequately respond to the factual needs and concerns of the electorate. The notion of fake news as illegitimate interference by foreign powers, based on lies and deployed with malicious intent, appears consequently as a too simple explanation for complex phenomena.

Against this background, the present contribution introduces a selection of terms important for a better understanding of the nature of what we, with reference to Wardle (2019), describe as information disorder. Seeing communalities between phenomena such as propaganda, PR, and fake news (see also Lazer et al. 2018), we use information disorder as an overarching concept that enables a more precise distinction between these three instances of deceptive information. In the following, we first develop a genealogy of the terms propaganda and PR, before we move on to a description of the phenomenon of fake news. In the process, we show how commercial digital technologies have created new conditions for the functioning and efficacy of deceptive information practices and propose information disorder as an overarching concept incorporating all forms of influence and manipulation techniques regularly employed by both state and non-state actors.

From propaganda to PR

Contrary to received wisdom, propaganda in its various forms and iterations is not something only typical for authoritarian systems of rule, but emerges as a rather regular practice of governance used by all types of political regimes including liberal democracies (see, for instance, Lazarsfeld & Merton 1957 [1948]; Schiller 1973; Herman & Chomsky 2002 [1988]; McChesney 2008; Roy & Cusack 2016; Zollmann 2019; Wimberly 2020). Despite this fact, propaganda as a regular instrument of governance is discussed rather seldomly. According to Zollmann (2019: 331) the term has been marginalized in discourses about public opinion formation in liberal democracies even though propaganda has also been in wide use by both state and corporate actors in these systems of governance for a long time. We will now explore where the overarching concept of propaganda originally emerged from and how it gradually transformed into the widely accepted practice of PR.

The term propaganda is based on the Latin verb ‘propagere’ meaning ‘to spread, disseminate, convey’. Originally denoting the distribution of physical

goods, the term was first used in connection with the dissemination of ideas and values in 1622 in Pope Gregor XV's *Congregatio de propaganda fide* (Wimberly 2020: 1). Here, to propagate the Christian faith meant to spread the word of God among the heathen people of the planet – a practice that became an important task for missionaries taking part in the conquest of new worlds offering exploitative colonial practices a coating of otherworldly legitimacy.

From these beginnings up until World War I, propaganda was not a negatively laden term. It was also often seen as a necessary requirement to harness public support and ensure the political and commercial viability of specific ideas or initiatives by states and powerful groups in democratic systems (Zollmann 2019: 331–333; Wimberly 2020: 4–5). A good example of this is the US' intervention in World War I, that was widely rejected in the US populace until then President Woodrow Wilson instructed George Creel to form the Committee for Public Information (CPI) to coordinate attempts to convince US voters otherwise (Wimberly 2020: 4–5). Some years later, social scientist and communication scholar Walter Lippman accordingly reflects on the intrinsic value of propagandistic techniques for governance in mass societies in his book *Public Opinion* (1922: Chapter XV/4: n.p.):

> The creation of consent is not a new art. It is a very old one, which was supposed to have died out with the appearance of democracy. But it has not died out. It has, in fact, improved enormously in technique, because it is now based on analysis rather than on rule of thumb. And so, as a result of psychological research, coupled with the modern means of communication, the practice of democracy has turned a corner.

Since World War I, a gradual shift in the evaluation of the term propaganda has occurred in the US and other democratic nations. Propaganda was increasingly associated with information operations conducted by the then enemy Germany to shore up public support (Zollmann 2019; Wimberly 2020). As George Creel (2018 [1920]: 4–5) put it in his book *How We Advertized America*, "we did not call it propaganda, for that word, in German hands, had come to be associated with deceit and corruption. Our effort was educational and informative throughout […] no other argument was needed."

From this point onward, two distinct concepts of propaganda can be differentiated: one that is neutral or positive, viewing propaganda as a tool for effectively managing democracies, and another that is negative, perceiving it as a means used by illegitimate actors to deceitfully manipulate the masses. This development was, according to Edward Bernays (cited in Wimberly

2020: 2) accompanied by an active rebranding effort in the US that led to the invention of a new concept – public relations, or PR, that was to replace the term propaganda now tarnished by the activities of hostile powers. According to Bernays (1955 [1928]: 37), who claimed the invention of the term for himself, PR is a necessary component of democratic governance. He notes that:

> [t]he conscious and intelligent manipulation of organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. […] This is the logical result of the way in which our democratic society is organized. Our invisible governors […] govern us by their qualities of natural leadership.

Similarly, election researcher Harold Lasswell (1927: 631), a Bernays contemporary, warned against attempts to let an inherently unruly and ill-informed electorate fend for itself, particularly in times of rapid social and technological change:

> The ever-present function of propaganda in modern life is in large measure attributable to the social disorganization which has been precipitated by the rapid advent of technological changes. Impersonality has supplanted personal loyalty to leaders. Literacy and the physical channels of communication have quickened the connection between those who rule and the ruled. Conventions have arisen which favor the ventilation of opinions and the taking of votes. Most of that which formerly could be done by violence and intimidation must now be done by argument and persuasion. Democracy has proclaimed the dictatorship of palaver, and the technique of dictating to the dictator is named propaganda.

In the views expressed above, propaganda – increasingly rebranded as PR – emerges not as a deficiency but a fundamental necessity in democratic governance under the condition of technological mass society. Neither is the use of propagandistic techniques limited to the political sphere. As for instance Oreskes & Conway (2010) have demonstrated, corporations regularly invoke flawed 'research' to strategically cast doubt on scientific consensus regarding issues such as the dangers of cigarettes, sugar, or opiates, as well as the human responsibility for climate change.

The semantic shift away from propaganda to other and more positively connoted terms, then, signals *not* a shift in the essentials of an established political and communicational practice (based on lies, half-truths, and deliberate manipulation as it is), but merely a shift in rhetoric distinguishing forms of

manipulation done by adversaries – marking these as illegitimate and malicious – from similar practices executed on behalf of oneself or one's allies that are framed as both necessary and beneficial. As such, the actor behind the manipulative strategy and not the (mal-)practice itself determines if one uses the term propaganda or PR.

PR, propaganda, and other related practices are about control of the public sphere of appearance that is an arena key for political deliberation and subjectification. As Judith Butler (2004: xx–xxi) writes in *Precarious Lives*: "The public sphere is in part constituted by what can appear, and the regulation of the sphere of appearance is one way to establish what will count as reality, and what will not." PR and propaganda are powerful tools to achieve and maintain such a regulation of public spheres of appearance – and the conduct of subjects – regardless of where these interventions are conducted and whose interests they serve. As Wimberly (2020: 11) expresses it, "propaganda is a response to free conduct and an attempt, not to dominate it via violence or physical constraint, but to conduct it in its freedom towards the desired outcomes". Control of the public sphere through media manipulation implies control of debates and therefore deliberation translating directly into political power.

In liberal democracies, propagandists are most efficient when they manage to acquire definitional power over issue areas without taking recourse in oppressive and authoritarian measures such as overt censorship and control. Rather, propaganda is created and disseminated through complex networks of incentives and obstacles that are internalized by journalists, editors, and readers in what Herman and Chomsky (2002 [1988]: x) have termed a "guided market system" of media manipulation through self-censorship. The authors write: "Most biased choices in the media arise from the preselection of right-thinking people, internalized preconceptions, and the adaptation of personnel to the constraints of ownership, organization, market, and political power." In such a system, censorship and propaganda are reproduced through mundane everyday practices of both journalists and editors and are therefore difficult to identify and resist.

To show how exactly propaganda operates in commercial news media, Herman and Chomsky develop a series of five filters that tacitly predispose practices and thereby lead to an increasing homogenization in the way specific issues and events – in particular those pertaining to foreign and security policies as well as the economy – are reported. As a result of this, also in liberal democracies, mass media often narrowly frame issues in correspondence with powerful interests or merely index elite positions within countries (Herman & Chomsky 2022; see also Bennett 1990).

As the rough walkthrough above indicates, propaganda and PR are key elements of state governance and corporate influence not only in autocratic societies but also in liberal democracies (for further evidence, see Lippman 1922; Lasswell 1927; Bernays 1955 [1928]; Lazarsfeld & Merton 1957 [1948]; Herman & Chomsky 2002 [1988]; Waever et al. 2006; Zollmann 2019; Wimberly 2020). To make political systems function efficiently, control of the mass media becomes key as it enables the efficient 'manufacturing of consent' for political issues deemed important for specific interests. Therefore, as MacLeod (2019: 1) puts it, even in liberal democracies "[t]he media is not your friend". Propaganda, PR, and other techniques of manipulation of both citizens and consumers for the sake of furthering particular agendas is part and parcel of the mass media's fundamental function within all types of governance. We will now turn our attention to the question of how new digital network technologies relate to such practices. Here, the term fake news will become useful as it enables attention to new factors relevant for the production and distribution of the PR-propaganda nexus.

Propaganda in times of digital capitalism

The phenomenon of false news items is not new and has been used for propagandistic purposes for a long time (see e.g. Floridi 1996). The specific term fake news, however, has only recently become a buzzword – particularly since Donald Trump's election campaign in 2015. On the one hand it is now often applied by established media as an explanatory model for the malign manipulation of political processes and actors (Farkas & Shou 2018: 298). On the other hand, it is employed by partisan political groups to discredit politicians and media they disagree with (Tong et al. 2020) and weaponized by political elites to undermine and delegitimate their opponents (Farkas & Schou 2018; Frank 2020).

Despite the availability of substantial research on fake news (Wardle & Derakhshans 2017; Finneman & Ryan 2018; Tandoc, Lim & Ling 2018; Molina et al. 2021), no agreement as to the precise meaning of the term has so far been reached. Descriptions have brought it into the vicinity of genres such as satire, news parody, junk science, clickbait, advertising, rumors, conspiracy theories, hoaxes, urban legends, and not least propaganda (Hirst 2017: 90; Bergmann 2018: 153; Finneman & Rian 2018; Tandoc, Lim & Ling 2018; Zimdars 2020a: A common point of reference regarding the nature of the phenomenon is its practice of mimicking formal journalistic conventions to repackage fabricated or otherwise manipulated content, often with the aim of achieving specific goals (e.g. Allcott & Gentzkow 2017: 217; Hirst 2017; Bergmann 2018; Finneman & Thomas 2018; Duffy, Tandoc & Ling 2019; Zimdars & McLeod 2020: 2; Lazer et al. 2018).

According to Carmi et al. (2020) and Gradón et al. (2021), production and dissemination of fake news are characterized by the widespread use of disinformation practices, implying an awareness among producers and possibly distributors of the untrue, non-factual, and biased nature of the presented content (see Carmi et al. 2020: 3 and Gradón et al. 2021: 2).[1] In this context, fake news can be seen in close terminological proximity to propaganda and PR. This raises the question of how fake news differs from these more established concepts or whether it is just an old technique of manipulation in new clothes.

One novel aspect of fake news lies in its technological and economic contexts of production and dissemination. The use of fake news in connection with commercial social media enables minor actors and even individuals to engage in propaganda efforts as these media undermine the gatekeeping functions of traditional media. While this initially enhanced the capacity of fake news to spread uncontrollably and made the planning and focused implementation of traditional propaganda and PR efforts more difficult (Hoskins & O'Loughlin 2010), the affordances of commercial social media have since led to the development of new methods to influence and control the flow of information through digital media ecologies (Treré 2016; Lulamae 2022; Leerssen 2023). In addition to this, the often divisive and affective form and content of fake news make them ideal objects for soliciting increased audience engagement in hyper-commercialized online environments that profit from clickbait logics and the emotional amplification of users (Andrejevic 2020; Zimdars 2020a).

What becomes palpable here is the importance of dynamics created at the levels of political economy and technical affordances that are significant for a proper understanding of fake news in times of digital capitalism (see Fuchs 2021). Zimdars (2020a: 2) for instance considers fake news as "primarily produced by individuals who are concerned *not* with gathering and reporting information to the world, but rather with generating profit through social media circulation of false information (…)" (emphasis in original). Arguing from a similar vantage point and specifically highlighting a technology-economy nexus, Andrejevic (2020: 20) explains that fake news is an emerging form of propaganda that is "the result of economic imperatives (the platform economy's privileging of

[1] Both Carmi et al. (2020: 3) and Gradón et al. (2021) introduce additional types of potentially harmful information practices – misinformation and malinformation. According to these authors, misinformation is severely biased or outright false information that is produced and disseminated without harmful intent, while malinformation describes factual information deployed with the intent to harm another actor. We perceive these two types as not relevant for the present inquiry that is focused on the dynamics caused by both production and distribution of intentionally deployed non-factual news items. Gradón et al. (2021) also add the term propaganda to this list but, in contrast to our usage based on Zollmann (2019) and Wimberly (2020), limit the term to activities by governments.

engagement over content) and technological affordances (the 'democratization' of access to publication and distribution online)". In this view, fake news is the result of a specific business model brought forth by commercial social media that affectively amplify audiences and revamp the public sphere as an arena for the exchange of opinions for the sake of self-branding and clickbait profit rather than democratic deliberation.

This understanding of fake news is exemplified by the run up to the 2016 US presidential election. Based on interviews with the owners of two fake news sites producing predominantly anti-Clinton and pro-Trump fake news, Herman (2016) showed that the fabricated information resulted from click-bait logics and profit considerations rather than from an attempt to wield political influence. Both owners reported that economic calculations rather than political lenience determined the content spread on their sites – anti-Clinton messages simply made more people click and engage thereby securing increased revenues when compared to anti-Trump content.

Following these authors, fake news emerges not only as a new tool for old-fashioned propaganda and PR, but also as the result of a specific business model under the conditions of digital capitalism (Zimdars 2020a; Fuchs 2021). The technical affordances of commercial social media enable the emotional and affective amplification of audiences for the sake of both profit maximization *and* political manipulation. This makes these technologies important tools for political communication and PR in what Farkas and Shou (2019: 5–6) have termed "post-truth societies" and renders unprecedented powers to the entities controlling the contemporary means of communication – some of the world's largest and most influential corporations (Treré 2016; Andrejevic 2020; Zimdars 2020a; Fuchs 2021). Companies such as Meta, Alphabet, Microsoft, or Tencent can be seen to perform old gatekeeping functions in a new guise (Johnson & Kelling 2018: 817–819) and fake news often serves as a scapegoat for the justification of increasingly far-reaching and tight measures of censorship and control in digital networks. The methods used for such purposes include unevenly enforced community guidelines, enhanced surveillance of users, the removing of posts or accounts, and the tacit tweaking of algorithms to suppress content that is considered problematic and not in line with predefined criteria (shadowbanning) (see Fuchs 2021; Lulamae 2022; Leerssen 2023).

Under the conditions outlined above, fact checking services and information literacy campaigns focused on the evaluation of content and sources alone won't do the trick against new forms of manipulation (Farkas & Shou 2019). As Zimdars (2020b: 362) writes, "misinformation is too often addressed

by encouraging individuals to analyze and fact-check sources, while letting a handful of companies continue to irresponsibly control global flows of information with little to no oversight". Without proper attention to issues of political economy, technical affordances of, and power structures behind the dominating commercial digital communication technologies, many interventions against fake news and other manipulative practices by both civil society and responsible state actors will be in vain as they leave structural issues such as economic incentives as well as ownership and control of global media and communication channels untouched.

As we have shown, commercial social media add new dynamics to the propaganda-PR nexus. They leave considerable power with the corporate actors currently controlling the world's largest online platforms and thereby point beyond the limited issue of fake news (Treré 2016). Quite contrary to their frequent portrayal as participatory, and democratic tools, commercial social media and other digital communication technologies regularly serve the interests of powerful propagandists. More efficient and advanced forms of control by governments and corporations over both content and channels of dissemination combined with easy access to unprecedented amounts of user-data enable practices of propaganda and control that were unthinkable for democratic societies only two decades ago. As Treré (2016: 136) puts it, "[t]he algorithmic construction of consent and the artificial sabotage of dissent demonstrate that there is nothing inherently democratic in digital technologies." The recent wedding of tech billionaires such as Musk and Thiel to the far right in the US is only one additional factor attesting to the dangers pointed out by Treré.

Propaganda, PR and fake news as forms of information disorder

The previous section has shown that the concepts of propaganda, PR, and fake news are closely related. To connect and distinguish between them as members of one family of information disorder (Wardle & Derakhsham 2017) we use the aspects of *intent*, *degree of manipulation*, *form and content*, *source*, *channels*, as well as *context*. In the following section, we will briefly exemplify each of these family markers and show their applicability in ordering contemporary instances of information disorder.

Intent behind message production plays a key role in understanding the character of the respective instance of information disorder one focuses on. Distortion of facts may occur unintentionally, as seen in cases of misunderstandings or inaccuracies, which are often referred to as misinformation (see also Camri et al. 2020; Gradón et al. 2021). Propaganda, PR, and fake news, by contrast, are

intentionally produced to serve specific interests. Their (further) dissemination may occur with malicious intent or in good faith (Apuke & Omar 2021).

What sets fake news apart from propaganda and PR is the underlying business models and profit considerations driving its production and dissemination: Unlike the latter, fake news can be created purely for economic gain, with any political implications arising as unintended side-effects (Herman 2016; Andrejevic 2020; Zimdars 2020a). And in contrast to PR and propaganda, fake news can be deployed solely for entertainment (as is the case in satire or newspaper hoaxes).

Another distinguishing variable for determining the nature of distorted information is the *degree of manipulation*: whether information has been entirely fabricated, whether it contains a kernel of "truth", or whether factual elements have been deliberately taken out of context (Finneman & Ryan 2018: 352; Molina et al. 2021: 194–195). While propaganda and PR are often associated with both non-factual content and a reframing of facts to serve specific interests, fake news is primarily associated with false and fictitious content in the form of entirely fabricated news items (Giusti & Piras 2020: 65–66; Molina et al. 2021: 184).

Closely related to the variable *degree of manipulation* is the category of *form and content* of media messages, which is equally important for differentiating various instances of information disorder. While propaganda and PR employ a variety of forms to reach and tacitly influence audiences, fake news is most clearly characterized by its mimicking of journalistic genres such as newspaper articles, documentary clips, or reportages. Packaged as journalistic, these items are disseminated as factual accounts despite their false or severely biased content.

This leads to another key variable, namely the *source* of the information conveyed in a manipulative endeavor. It is essential to consider whether the source is explicitly known, whether it is acting in an official or unofficial capacity, and, if so, whether it operates from a position of institutional or economic power in a top-down manner, or if it represents the collective voice of undefined groups communicating in a bottom-up manner. The latter is often the origin of fake news, but rarely of propaganda or PR.

Closely related to the source-variable is the question of which communication *channels* are being employed. The channels used to convey manipulative messages can expand or restrict the discursive space regarding both sender and receiver. Propaganda and PR often use established news channels such as traditional news media to insert biased messages into public discourse. In contrast, fake news predominantly relies upon commercial digital platforms that facilitate broad participation and therefore facilitate a quick distribution of content.

The last variable for distinguishing between different members of the terminological family of information disorder is *context*. Context predisposes how efficient manipulative techniques operate at a given time and location. In general, situations where information is scarce, insecurity is high, and the level of trust in political, societal, and economic institutions is low prove beneficial to fake news (DiFonzo & Bordia 2007b: 13). In contrast, propaganda and PR often rely on established institutions and renowned socio-political actors to increase both range of address and trustworthiness of the disseminated content. All forms of information disorder are facilitated by the formation of algorithmically reinforced commercial echo chambers and filter bubbles built by ideologically likeminded people (Bakshy et al. 2015). Such partisan networks are petri dishes for the reinforcement and distribution of fake news and can be solicited for more well-planned propagandistic and PR-efforts as well (Brummette et al. 2018).

As we have shown above, propaganda, PR, and fake news are frequently employed in both liberal democracies and other forms of governance by both political and commercial actors. Still, clearly defining these concepts remains a complex and problematic task. There is limited value in examining isolated cases of allegedly distorted news in a vacuum. Instead, we have proposed a more comprehensive framework that can develop a nuanced understanding of these terms as instances of what we have described as the overarching phenomenon of information disorder. Approaching propaganda, fake news, and PR based on the variables *intent*, *degree of manipulation*, *form and content*, *source*, *channel*, as well as *context*, we have shown their interdependence and interconnectedness as part of the broader terminological family of information disorder.

In times of paranoia, everyone needs to think like a shrink: A conclusion

Our current moment in history is characterized by a palpable absence of utopias that might enable progressive social change and a communal approach to the pluricrises currently threatening life and well-being of and on our planet. Capitalist realism, as conceptualized by Mark Fisher (2009), empties political discourses of meaning and undermines social engagement thereby "petrifying politics" (Pötzsch 2023) and reducing democracy to an increasingly authoritarian management of alleged necessities realized through ritualized biannual voting procedures without any other alternatives. Meanwhile, the already hyper-rich bag larger and larger chunks of globally available wealth with detrimental effects for societies and the planetary ecosystem. Combined with technological systems, the business models of which systematically create and amplify polarizing negative affect and emotions, the developments outlined above have created a perfect storm for civil

societies already brought to the brink of break down by more than four decades of relentless neo-liberalization (Dean 2009; Brown 2019; Chamayou 2019; Fraser 2022). Within such frames, propaganda, PR, and fake news become conceivable as political techniques necessary to maintain consent for a given socio-political status-quo despite mounting evidence that precisely this status-quo is unsustainable in multiple ways. Propaganda, PR, and fake news are important elements that keep such derelict systems working smoothly.

In this contribution, we argue that to be able to properly engage the pluri-crises of climate disaster, war, growing precarity, inequality, and polarization under conditions of global financialized tech-capitalism, a genuinely progressive populism is required that takes seriously the very real fears, anxieties, anger, and problems of a majority of the world's populations faced with increasingly pathologic levels of hypocrisy and double-standards among globally dominating elites (Roy & Cusack 2016; Mouffe 2018; Prentoulis 2020; Frank 2021). Such a progressive form of populism requires access to a media system bent on more than the reproduction of elite interests. In other words, a necessary genuine re-democratization of politics and a re-invigoration of civil societies and the public sphere in liberal democracies requires a media system without the inherent propagandistic flaws identified in the present article as information disorder – it requires a media system with sustainable checks and balances to keep various iterations of propaganda, PR, and fake news at bay, and enable both democratic participation and deliberation without recourse to manipulation from either above or below.

Bibliography

Allcott, H., Gentzkow, M. (2017). Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *31*(2). https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.31.2.211

Andrejevic, M. (2020). The Political Function of Fake News: Disorganized Propaganda in the Era of Automated Media. In: M. Zimdars, K. McLeod (eds.), *Fake News: Understanding Media and Misinformation in the Digital Age*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Apuke, O.D., Omar, B. (2021). Fake News and COVID-19: Modelling the Predictors of Fake News Sharing Among Social Media Users. *Telematics and Informatics*, 56. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2020.101475

Bennett, W.L. (1990). Toward a Theory of Press-State Relations in the United States. *Journal of Communication*, *40*(2).

Bergmann, E. (2018). *Conspiracy & Populism: The Politics of Misinformation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bernays, E. (1955) [1928]. *Propaganda*. New York: IG Publishing.

Brown, W. (2019). *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Brummette, J., DiStaso, M., Vafeiadis, M., Messner, M. (2018). Read All About It: The Politicization of "Fake News" on Twitter. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *95*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699018769906

Butler, J. (2004). *Precarious Lives: When is Life Grievable?* London: Verso.

Carmi, E., Simeon, J.Y., Eleanor L., Pawluczuk, A. (2020). Data Citizenship: Rethinking Data Literacy in the Age of Disinformation, Misinformation, and Malinformation. *Internet Policy Review, 9*(2).

Chamayou, G. (2019). *Die unregierbare Gesellschaft: Eine Genealogie des autoritären Liberalismus*. Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag.

Creel, G. (2018) [1920]. *How We Advertized America*. London: Forgotten Books.

Dean, J. (2009). *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.

DiFonzo, N., Bordia, P. (2007b). *Rumor Psychology: Social and Organizational Approaches*. Washington: American Psychological Association. https://doi-org.mime.uit.no/10.1037/11503-000

Duffy, A., Tandoc, E., Ling, R. (2020). Too Good To Be True, Too Good Not To Share: The Social Utility of Fake News. *Information, Communication & Society, 23*(13). https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2019.1623904

Farkas, J., Schou, J. (2018). Fake News as a Floating Signifier: Hegemony, Antagonism and the Politics of Falsehood. *Javnost – The Public, 25*(3). https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2018.1463047

Farkas, J., Schou, J. (2019). *Post-Truth, Fake News and Democracy*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429317347

Finneman, T., Thomas, R.J. (2018). A family of Falsehoods: Deception, Media Hoaxes and Fake News. *Newspaper Research Journal, 39*(3). https://doi.org/10.1177/0739532918796228

Fisher, M. (2009). *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Winchester: Zero Books.

Floridi, L. (1996). Brave.Net.World: The Internet as a Disinformation Superhighway? *The Electronic Library, 14*(6). doi:10.1108/eb045517

Frank, T. (2017). *Listen, Liberal: Or, What Ever Happened to the Party of the People?* New York: Picador.

Frank, T. (2021). *The People, No: A Brief History of Anti-Populism*. New York: Picador.

Fraser, N. (2022). *Cannibal Capitalism: How our System is Devouring Democracy, Care, and the Planet – and What We Can Do About It*. London: Verso Books.

Fuchs, Ch. (2021). *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*. London: Sage.

Giusti, S., Piras, E. (2020). *Democracy and Fake News*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003037385

Gradón, K.T., Holyst, J.A., Moy, W.R,, Sienkiewicz, J., Suchecki, K. (2021). Countering Misinformation: A Multidisciplinary Approach. *Big Data & Society* (January-June).

Herman, E., Chomsky, N. (2002) [1988]. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Herman, J. (2016). Inside Facebook's (Totally Insane, Unintentionally Gigantic, Hyperpartisan) Political-Media Machine. *New York Times Magazine* (August 28). https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/28/magazine/inside-facebooks-totally-insane-unintentionally-gigantic-hyperpartisan-political-media-machine.html

Hirst, M. (2017). Towards a Political Economy of Fake News. *The Political Economy of Communication, 5*(2).

Hoskins, A., O'Loughlin, B. (2010). *War and Media: The Emergence of Diffused War*. London: Polity Press.

Johnson, B.G., Kelling, K. (2018). Placing Facebook. *Journalism Practice*, *12*(7). https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2017.1349546

Lasswell, H. (1927). The Theory of Political Propaganda. *The American Political Science Review, 21*(3).

Lazarsfeld, P.F., Merton, R.K. (1957) [1948]. Mass Communication, Popular Taste and Organised Social Action. In: B. Rosenberg, D.M. White (eds.), *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*. New York: The Free Press.

Lazer, D.M.J., Baum, M.A., Benkler, Y., Berinsky, A.J., Greenhill, K.M., Menczer, F., Metzger, M.J., Nyhan, B., Pennycook, G., Rothschild, D., Schudson, M., Sloman, S.A., Sunstein, C.R., Thorson, E.A., Watts, D.J., Zittrain, J.L. (2018). The Science of Fake News. *Science*, *359*(6380). https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aao2998

Leerssen, P. (2023). An End to Shadow Banning? Transparency Rights in the Digital Services Act Between Content Moderation and Curation. *Computer Law & Security Review*, 48. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clsr.2023.105790

Lippman, W. (1922). *Public Opinion*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company.

Lulamae, J. (2022). How the 'Shadow Banning' Mystery is Messing with Climate Activists' Heads. *Algorithm Watch* (June 28). https://perma.cc/JYC5-BQ82

MacLeod, A. (2019). Introduction: Propaganda in the Information Age. In: A. MacLeod (ed.), *Propaganda in the Information Age: Still Manufacturing Consent*. London: Routledge.

McChesney, R.W. (2008). *The Political Economy of Media: Enduring Issues, Emerging Dilemmas*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Molina, M.D., Sundar, S.S., Le, T., Lee, D. (2021). "Fake News" Is Not Simply False Information: A Concept Explication and Taxonomy of Online Content. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *65*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764219878224

Mouffe, Ch. (2018). *For a Left Populism*. London: Verso.

Pötzsch, H. (2022). Towards a Diagnostics of the Present: Popular Culture, Post-Apocalyptic Macro-Dystopia, and the Petrification of Politics. In: L. Johannessen, A. Grønstad (eds.), *Micro-Dystopia: Aesthetics and Ideologies in a Broken Moment*. London: Lexington Books.

Oreskes, N., Conway, E.M. (2010). *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth On Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming* (E.M. Conway, Ed.). Bloomsbury Press.

Prentoulis, M. (2020). *Left Populism in Europe: Lessons Learned from Jeremy Corbyn to Podemos*. London: Pluto Press.

Pötzsch, H. (2023). Towards a Diagnostics of the Present: Popular Culture, Post-Apocalyptic Macro-Dystopia, and the Petrification of Politics, In: L. Johannessen and, A. Grønstad (eds.), *Micro-Dystopia: Aesthetics and Ideologies in a Broken Moment*. London: Lexington Books, 17-40.

Johannessen L., Grønstad, A. (eds.) (2023). *Micro-Dystopia: Aesthetics and Ideologies in a Broken Moment*. London: Lexington Books, 17-40.

Roy, A., Cusack, J. (2016). *Things that Can and Cannot Be Said: Essays and Conversations*. New York: Haymarket Books.

Schiller, H.I. (1973). *The Mind Managers*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Tandoc, E.C., Lim, Z.W., Ling, R. (2018). Defining "Fake News." *Digital Journalism*, *6*(2). https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143

Tong, C., Gill, H., Li, J., Valenzuela, S., Rojas, H. (2020). "Fake News Is Anything They Say!" — Conceptualization and Weaponization of Fake News among the American Public. *Mass Communication and Society, 23*(5). https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2020.1789661

Treré, E. (2016). The Dark Side of Digital Politics: Understanding Algorithmic Manufacturing of Consent and the Hindering of Online Dissidence. *IDS Bulletin, 47*(1).

Weaver, C.K., Motion, J., Roper, J. (2006). From Propaganda to Discourse (and Back Again): Truth, Power, the Public Interest, and Public Relations. In: J. L'Etang, M. Pieczka (eds.), *Public Relations: Critical Debates and Contemporary Practice*. London: Routledge.

Wimberly, C. (2020). *How Propaganda Became Public Relations: Foucault and the Corporate Government of the Public*. London: Routledge.

Zimdars, M. (2020a). Introduction. In: M. Zimdars, K. McLeod (eds.), *Fake News: Understanding Media and Misinformation in the Digital Age*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Zimdars, M. (2020b). Viral 'Fake News' Lists and the Limitations of Labeling and Fact Checking. In: M. Zimdars, K. McLeod (eds.), *Fake News: Understanding Media and Misinformation in the Digital Age*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Zollmann, F. (2019). Bringing Propaganda Back into News Media Studies. *Critical Sociology, 45*(3).

Abstract

This article offers an outline of the terms propaganda and public relations before addressing the contemporary phenomenon of fake news. We identify commonalities and differences between these three manipulative practices and show that, rather than being exceptions, they constitute regular techniques of governance in both liberal democracies and more authoritarian systems of rule. Developing a set of family resemblances, we then show that propaganda, PR, and fake news belong to the overarching phenomenon of information disorder and are mainly distinguished by their reliance upon different aesthetic conventions, dissemination technologies, and business models.

Słowa kluczowe: propaganda, fake news, ideologia, PR

Keywords: propaganda, fake news, ideology, PR