

Propaganda and fake news in media

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



“ To learn who rules over you, simply find out who you are not allowed to criticize.” - Voltaire, The Catholic Church suppressing atheistic books. Hitler banned all books in Nazi Germany except for his autobiography, Mein Kampf. The apartheid government prohibited news of resistance being published by media outlets nationwide. These all have one common thread; they form part of censorship. But information thought to be objectionable and offensive to whom? Ultimately it is all very subjective. The Catholic Church portraying themselves as accepting and transparent. The Swastika appearing in Donald Duck Cartoons during World War 2. The National Party labeling their oppressive system as one meant to combat Communism rather than what it was actually about; racial division and oppression of those thought to be different on the grounds of pseudo-sciences and philosophies. The common thread in these scenarios? Propaganda. According to Thomas Sowell, “ The media are less a window on reality, than a stage on which officials and journalists perform self-scripted, self-serving fictions.” This begs the question; is fake news really just another form of censorship?

Fake news, formally known as misinformation, is more than just a term coined by current American president Donald Trump but has actually been around for centuries. However, due to Trump’s contribution ‘ fake news’ was named 2017’s Word of the Year. And even though Trump has admitted to labeling negative news on him as ‘ fake news’ in order to retain a good public image there may be some validity in the idea of the media pushing misinformation. Last year MSNBC’s news anchor, Mika Brzezinski stated in an interview that it is the media’s job to control what people think. We as human beings have a tendency to believe most things we read on the

internet when many of those sources are not that credible. Last year a British journalist by the name of Oobah Butler had an idea that ' within the current climate of misinformation, and society's willingness to believe absolute nonsense, maybe creating a fake restaurant was possible'. He subsequently proved that it was possible as he started flooding this fake restaurant's TripAdvisor page with good reviews and got his friends and family to do the same. He posted pictures of fake food, he had created with items such as shaving cream and sponges and even got a celebrity he met at a bar to endorse this restaurant he had called The Shed at Dulwich. After six months The Shed topped TripAdvisor's rankings as the number one restaurant in London out of 18000 other restaurants. Butler had a burner phone on which he answered calls from interested patrons and simply told them the restaurant was fully booked for the next few months. Companies tried to send this restaurant free samples, people were willing to travel from other countries to try get into " the UK's best restaurant" and hundreds of people wanted to apply for jobs there without ever having been there. Butler then decided he was ready to expose how easy it was to trick TripAdvisor's supposedly 100% reliable system by allowing 20 people to make reservations for one night. The address he gave them was his home address and upon their arrival he served the readymade TV meals. If this whole elaborate scheme of tricking a hospitality rating website was so simply and effectively carried out by one journalist imagine what a news broadcaster or government would be capable of. A little closer to home, the Guptas proved the susceptibility of the media agencies in South Africa with the Bell Pottinger debacle. Bell Pottinger was a British. If news broadcasters are able

to alter the media supplied to the masses then are they not ultimately censoring what is being portrayed as fact and fiction; thereby making fake news and propaganda another stream of censorship as it limits freedom of thought.

The proposed solution by Trump himself is to censor fake news but that would further impose on basic rights to information and freedom of speech. According to Justice Potter Stewart, " censorship reflects a society's lack of confidence in itself. It is the hallmark of an authoritarian regime..." It is our responsibility as a society to not just accept that which we are told as the full story, but to ask the necessary questions and demand the necessary truths.