By has (allcott, 2016). fake news first

Business, Industries

By 2025, 50% of children will be autistic (Oxenham, 2015). Recently, NASA discovered thatthe earth has a second moon.

(Yates, 2016). The United Nations plans to ban homework. (Yates, 2016). These are all examples of " fake news stories" which have circulated in ourmedia in the past year.

2016 saw the rise of the term " fake news" made popularby President Donald Trump, and this year the term has been named the " word ofthe year" for 2017, but what exactly does fake news refer to (Flood, 2017)? Fakenews can be defined as purposely spreading false information under the pretextof being authentic news. This fake information is able to spread and haveimpact via social media outlets such as Facebook and Google (Allcott, 2017). Thisessay will further examine the role of Google in contributing to the issue butalso it's attempt, through various initiatives, to solve it. To begin, furtherbackground information will be given on the issue of fake news.

Next, thehistory, purpose and structure of Google will be described. Afterwards, thevarious positions taken and Google's various initiative will be highlighted andfinally critiqued.   Real Information onthe Fake News Issue To begin, whilethe issue of fake news might seem like a new phenomena, it has been present inour society longer than objective news has (Allcott, 2016). Fake news firstemerged in 1439 with the invention of the printing press. In those days, it washard to tell fact from fiction in the printed news and the printed press aloudfor this false information to be mass printed and thus have a greater reach. Thefake information spread tended to be sensationalist and extreme in order toemphasize individual's prejudices. For

instance, in 1475, an anti-sematic storywas spread which stipulated that Jewish people were killing young Christianchildren and drinking their blood for Passover. This false story spurred hatetowards this religious group and strengthened already present prejudices.

Atits worst, fake information can also provoke violence against certain groups. Manycases of fake news stories against already marginalized groups were printed andspread in the 19th century. More specifically, in the 1800s fakenews reports about African Americans and Irishmen were printed which leadviolent outbreaks against these communities. It is this violence which lead tothe protest by the public for objective journalism based on factual news.

In the20th century, objective journalism became the dominant businessmodel and is still in place today (Allcott, 2016). However, theintroduction of social media has dramatically altered the way we consumejournalism. A recent study has shown that 62% of US adults get their news fromsocial media sites such as Facebook and Twitter (Soll, 2016). Furthermore, socialmedia has lead to the re-emergence of fake news in our society and isincreasingly becoming an issue because it is widespread and hard for readers tospot (Soll, 2016). Social mediais responsible for the re-emergence of fake news in our society but what makessocial media sites such as Facebook and Google conducive to the spreading offalse information? Three reasons explain the success of fake news via socialmedia and why this platform is essential for the spreading of false reports (Allcott, 2016).

Tobegin, because of the way social media platforms are structured, there is a lowentry barrier into the industry which makes it easy to set up fake news websitesand monetize them through advertisements. Unlike real mass media outlets, theydon't need to publish real information to maintain their reputation. Tocontinue, this low barrier of entry allows anyone, regardless of theirqualifications or lack of, to spread information which may get as many clicksand reads as articles published by Fox New, CNN or the New York Times (Allcott, 2016). Forexample, during the the 2016 presidential elections, people saw more fake newsstories published by ordinary people than real news stories published byjournalists (Silverman, 2016). What this means is that individualswith no prior reputation, track record or fact checking can get viewing similaror greater to professionals in the field. Finally, the algorithms who run thesesocial media accounts do not have the ability to gage the accuracy or theobjectivity of the articles it promotes. Overall, social media is integral tothe spreading of false stories because of its structure which allows for anyoneto have access to the platform, allowing them to spread information and havingno fact checking or algorithms capable of deciphering false information and stoppingits spreading (Allcott, 2016). Tocontinue, there are two reasons which drive people to use social media tospread fake news stories (Allcott, 2016).

The first reason is financial; individuals can make a large amount of money when their fake stories go viral. This seems to be the motivation for a large majority of fake news writers. Forexample, during the 2016 elections, teens living in Macedonia who had no stakesin the election, were able to make thousands of dollars off of their fake electionnews stories. Their fake news

sites were active only during the pre-electiontime and disintegrated once the election was over and they could no longerprofit off of fake coverage of the event. Furthermore, they spread storieswhich were both pro-Clinton and pro-Trump.

The second reason individuals decideto create and spread news stories is for ideological reasons. Unlike theteenagers in Macedonia who reported an equal amount of pro-Trump andpro-Clinton articles, some sites were create to promote just one candidate. Forinstance, a Romanian man started his site endingthefed. com in order to help theTrump campaign. In this way, fake news websites are created with eitherfinancial and/or ideological reasoning in mind (Allcott, 2016). However, whether fake news sites are created for economic and ideological reasons, theyinevitably cause significant negative consequences. The three main consequences are the declinein credibility of the media industry, the impact on public opinion as well asthe increased polarization between people with opposing views.

Surveys have shown that seventy-eight percentof people believe that fake news has damaged the credibility of the media (Allcott, 2016). Furthermore, the trust in the media is at a historical low at only 32% (GallupInc, 2016). These findings are alarming since journalism plays a fundamental role in ourdemocracy. The erosion of trust for this crucial institutions threatensdemocracy (Hafiz, 2011). What's more, fake news has the ability to sway public opinion and again disruptdemocracy. It has this ability to sway public opinion because people arecreating their opinions based on false information (Levin, June 2017).

Anexample of this is the election of Trump in 2016. In the months leading up tothe election, the fake news circulating was heavily in favor of Trump overHilary which may have convinced certain people to eventually vote for him (Allcott, 2016). Finally, polarization has also been on the rise because of fake news. For example, during the tragic Las Vegas Shooting, both right-wing and left-wing writersinvented fake information regarding the political affiliation of the shooter inorder to vilify the opposing side. The right-wing fake news writers claimed thatthe shooter was a trump-hater and part of the anti-fascist group Antifa.

Conversely, lift-wing writers attempted to paint the shooter as an ultra-right Trumpsupporter. When this information is able to reach spread and reach many people, it increases political polarization as one side increasingly sees the other as bad(Levin, October 2017). To recapitulate, the three main consequences of fake news in our society arethe decline in credibility of the media, the impact on public opinion as wellas the increased polarization between people with opposing views Google's History GoogleInc. was founded by Larry Page and Sergey Brin in 1998. The company aims toorganize the worlds information and make it accessible by providing the bestsearch results for each query. The founders meet at Stanford University in 1995when Brin gave Page a campus tour. The following year, they began a partnershipworking together on Page's thesis statement for his masters and what wouldeventually become Google.

Their first version of the search engine was createdin their dorm room and was called Backrub. They later named their search engineGoogle after the

mathematical term googol which is 1 followed by 100 zeroes. ByAugust 1998, the duo had succeeded in collecting one million dollars fromvarious investors such as family, friends, and notably from Andy Bechtolsheimcofounder of Sun Microsystems Inc. This sizable investment permitted the teamto upgrade to their first office located in Menlo Park California. There, theyfocus on perfecting their search engine and the PageRank™ algorithm behind it.

Thisalgorithm works by bringing the most popular sites to the top during a search, and the least popular sites to the bottom. Furthermore, this algorithm uses thethe websites visited of millions of individuals to help determine whichwebsites have content of value (Sullivan, 2016) (" Howwe started and where we are today"). It is also during this time that the young companyenacted it's " Ten Things We Know to Be True" comprised of 10 statementsrepresenting the company's philosophy and values to guide them (" Ten things we know to betrue"). Oneof the statements worth noting is that the company vows to make money but withoutdoing evil. By 1999, Google had 25million in venture capital funding and was becoming increasingly popular. In2004 it had its IPO which raised 1.

66 billion for the company (" How we started and where we aretoday"). Today, Google is the most popular search engine and and has over three billionsearches per day (" GoogleSearch Statistics"). While they are primarily known for their search engine, they have also createdhundreds of other products such as YouTube and Android. This tech giantattracts talent from all

over the world and is currently operating in over 50different countries and employees over 60, 000 people (" How we started and where we are today").

They have beennamed the top company to work for in both 2007 and 2008. What makes Google adesirable place to work at is its corporate structure. Employees are allotted alot of independence and have access to top executive managers. Theirindependence and open communications policy makes employees feel that theycontribute and have a stake in the company (Frenz, 2017). Finally, Google underwent alarge re structuring when it became a subsidiary to Alphabet Inc in 2015. Alphabet Inc now oversees all of Googles new initiatives such as Jigsaw andNest (Yarow, 2015). Google and itsposition on Fake News At it'score, Google is a for profit organization and does not usually take stances ontimely issues and the way in which they make policy decisions inside theorganization is unknown. However, while the link between Google and the itsrole in spreading fake news is clear, it took outside pressure for Google topublicly recognize its role and to start taking action.

More precisely, the2016 election and the Los Vegas shooting in 2017, sparked public outcry as bothof these events were shaped and affected by fake information (Chaykowski, 2017)(Wingfield, 2016). When polled, 51% of people believe that social networks are the " mostresponsible for the proliferation of fake news". 72% also believe that thesesocial networking sites should block fake news on their websites (Lardieri, 2017). The public pressureurged them to acknowledge their role which lead to Google representative CongYu to issue the following statement in a blog post in April

2017: " Withthousands of new articles published online every minute of every day, theamount of content confronting people online can be overwhelming.

Andunfortunately, not all of it is factual or true, making it hard for people todistinguish fact from fiction" (Hill, 2017). Overall, Google's statements on its role in theproliferation of fake news steam from outside pressures to acknowledge the roletheir company has in spreading false information to billions of users (Chaykowski, 2017)(Wingfield, 2016). Examples of Press Releases and Conferenceson Fake News Aspreviously discussed, the public played an important role in pushing for Googleto recognize its role in the proliferation of fake news and to address theissue on it's platform.

Thus, educating the public on the topic is crucial tothe resistance of this fake news phenomenon. A conference was held at HarvardUniversity in February 2017 entitled " Combating Fake News: An Agenda forResearch and Action". The conference tackles many topics surrounding fake newssuch as the psychology behind it, it's history and how it spreads via socialmedia. A panel discussion was posted online from the conference which hasalmost 2000 views and educate even those who were not present at theconference. (Pazzanese, 2017) (" Combating Fake News: An Agenda for Research andAction, 2017"). Tocontinue, a press release was issued on September 19th 2017 by the CanadianJournalism Foundation who, along with CIVIX, will receive a grant from GoogleCanada. Recognizing that Canada also has a fake news problem and ahead of theCanadian elections, Google Canada through its philanthropic branch of thecompany Google. org is providing a 500, 000$

grant to help school aged childrenidentify fake news and understand the importance of journalism in a healthydemocracy.

The Canadian Journalism Foundation promotes excellence in journalismand through various initiatives teaches academics, students and journalistsabout the role of media in society and how it is evolving through the digitalera. CIVIX is a register charity which works to educate school aged Canadiansabout how to engage in democracy as Canadian citizens. Their vision is to havea Canadian democracy inclusive of young people who are knowledgeable on thetopic and able to engage and participate.

CIVIX is responsible for thesuccessfully Student Vote program which has reached 7, 5 000 Canadian schoolsand 98% of Canadian school boards. Both CIVIX and the Canadian JournalismFoundation recognize the crucial role of journalism in our democracy and stressit's importance. Funded by the Google. org grant, they will develop andimplement a new program called NewsWise. This program will emphasize theimportance of factual information in a democracy and increase news literacy inthe age of fake news. The program aims reach 1. 5 million kids aged to 9 to 19across Canada (Nanji, 2017) (Canadian Journalism Foundation, 2017). Google'sStrategy So far, Google'sstrategy for solving fake news comes in two parts: Project Owl and a FactChecking tool.

Project-Owl and the Fact Checking tool targets all people whouse their search engine (Nanji, 2017). Furthermore, Google uses the media effectively as well as it's personal blog in order tocommunicate about it's strategy. Google's first strategy to fight fake news is " ProjectOwl", which was

released to the press on April 25th 2017 (Hern, 2017) (Tomchak, 2017). Overall, this strategy employs two tactics to burry false information so that it nolonger features at the top of search results. The first tactic is to improvesearch rankings.

The algorithm is responsible for ranking stories and uses feedbackfrom users to determine what should appear as the top search but does not havethe ability to gage the accuracy of the articles it promotes. Fake news is ableto tamper with this and bring fake news stories to the top as it did during theLas Vegas shooting were the top search results wrongly identified the perpetratorof the mass shooting. The updated algorithm would work to bring more authoritativecontent and sites to the top of the search and and bring to the bottom inaccuratecontent and sites to the bottom. The second tactic is to add a feature whichwould allow users to give feedback by flagging content that appears in GoogleAutocomplete feature and Featured Snippets. Flagging content as inappropriateor inaccurate would allow Google to alter its search results (Tomchak, 2017) (Hern, 2017).

Google's secondstrategy, anew Fact Checking tool, was announced on April 7th 2017 onGoogle's blog. This Fact Checking tool will be available globally and display afact checking tag next articles which have been fact checked by an third partyorganization. This will combat fake news by identifying sources which are moreauthoritative and reliable (Kosslyn, 2017). Criticism of GoogleStrategy: Finally, the strategies adopted so far by Google are insufficient. Moreover, the companysays they will continue to put effort towards solving the problem, but so farthere have just been words and no

action (Chaykowski, 2017). There are many reasons why thetwo strategies are insufficient at address the fake news problem.

While Googledid attempt to target the root of the problem with it's new Project Owl, theywere ultimately unsuccessful in burrying false information so that it would nolonger features at the top of search results. In October 2017, fake new siteswere at the top of Google queries regarding the Las Vegas massacre. For manyhours, the top searches lead to inaccurate information about the shooting thusproving that Project Owl has not accomplished its intentions. Google respondedto the incident by saying: " This should not have appeared for any queries, andwe'll continue to make algorithmic improvements to prevent this from happeningin the future" (Chaykowski, 2017). Despite this, there has been no concrete steps reportedsince this statement. Next, the FactCheck service is difficult to evaluate asGoogle has remained private about the exact workings of this tool and whether ithas been a success or failure.

Furthermore, while Google has come out with afew solutions to tackle the problem, there are many more which could be implemented. For instance, Google said last year that it would ban it's GoogleAds on fakewebsites. Thiswould decrease the incentive to start this type of site because it would be impossibleto gain financially from this type of venture. However, since this announcementno legitimate plans have been made to put this policy into practice (Statt, 2016). On the other hand, Googlecontinues to state it's enthusiasm and effort to fixing the problem: " We aresuper energized by this, I have to say, super energized to fix these problems(…) People at

Google came out of the woodworks offering to help us with this. People felt really passionate about helping.

And so it was easy to staff areally strong team who worked hard. They cared deeply about the kind ofsituations being described and are very passionate about fixing it"(Sullivan, 2017). Google needs toremember that their words must be supported by actions if they want to indeedeliminate this issue. The company currently holds sixty-five percent of themarket share for search engines and should have a responsibility to thebillions on individuals who use their product (Sterling, 2015). Their platform filters and distortsthe information we digest about the world and thus have a large impact on the waywe end up viewing things.

If Google wishes to live by it's philosophy and not" do evil", it should take action against fake news instead of just talkingabout it (" Tenthings we know to be true"). Conclusion Inconclusion, this essay further examined the role of Google in contributing tothe fake news issue but also it's attempt, through various initiatives, tosolve it. The first section " Real Information on the Fake News Issue" conveyedinformation on the issue of fake news such as it's history, how itspreads via social media, the reason people purposely spread fake information, and its consequences.

The second section " Google's History" talked about thecompany's history, purpose and structure. The third section " Google and itsposition on Fake News", revealed how Google came to take a stance on fake news. The fourth section " Examples of Press Releases and Conferences on Fake News" spokeof the Harvard conference and press release of Google's grant.

The fifthsection, " Google's Strategy", outlined the two strategies adoptedby Google as well as it's target audience and how it used the media to informabout it's strategies. Finally, in the section " Criticism of Google Strategy", acritique of Google's strategy was given which concluded that so far Google'sinitiatives have been insufficient and more effort is needed by the company to properlycombat fake news.   Work Cited: Allcott, Hunt, and Matthew Gentzkow. " Social Media andFake News in the 2016 Election.

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