

# Chapter 10

## Fake Online News: Rethinking News Credibility for the Changing Media Environment

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Today, the media environment has traversed several phases of technological advancements and as a result, there is a shift in the production and consumption of news. This chapter conceived fake news within the milieu of influencing information spread in the society, especially on the cyberspace. Using the hierarchy of influence model trajectory with fake news, it was established that it has become almost impossible to sustain trust and credibility through individual influences on online news content. The primary reason is that journalists are constrained by professional ethics, organizational routines, and ownership influence. Rather than verify facts and offer supporting claims, online users without professional orientation engage in a reproducing information indiscreetly. The chapter recommends that ethics be reconsidered as a means to recreate and imbibe journalistic values that will contend with the fake news pandemic.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Technological advancement has grossly impacted and enhanced the processes of news production and dissemination, just like it has, other fields of human endeavour. In the face of increasing digital transformation, the relationship that existed between news (sources) and journalists is assuming a different dimension due largely to the growing popularity of independent and/or participatory journalism practices (Chan, 2014; Rössler, 2017).

Truly, the various platforms offered by the cyberspace have offered easy access and free style of information sharing. For many people, the internet is now the major other source of information and communication. As such, the traditional gatekeeping role of ‘the journalist’ has been snatched away because news consumers no longer wait for news but are bombarded with news from ‘everywhere’. Mehrotra

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## **Fake Online News**

(2017) upholds that gatekeeping in today's media environment is solely controlled by high-technology savvy companies, who use existing algorithms as gatekeepers. This is prolonged by the perceived purpose for which agenda is set, either to promote political agendas and/or financial profiteering. Thus, the notion of projecting fake news arises, as a result of the growing popularity of selected news ideas (Shao, Ciampaglia, Varol, Flammini & Menczer, 2017).

The presumed changeover has upheld a previous assertion by Heikkilä and Ahva (2015) that the powerful impact was previously exerted by the traditional media has been diffused by the new forms of purveying information. This rapid growth of information technologies no doubt has also created an overlap in the needs of the media (and) audiences. Therefore, the increasing needs for media content, especially news has raised questions bothering on the credibility of news (sources) in the changing journalistic practices.

There is a point of departure derived for the numerous alternative sources of news and/or information, which is credibility or the absence of it. While the traditional media has continued to manage their news processes in order to ensure credibility, some practitioners have had to rely on undependable sources of news mostly from the cyberspace, which later turns out to be imprecise or absolutely false. Curran, Fenton and Freedman (2016) argued that people's over-reliance on social media news has led to the hype of inaccurate information sources. In the same vein, their basis for this standpoint is due largely to the fact that online sources are built to facilitate communication and not to inform people the real sense of it.

On this basis, the new information society phenomenon which has warranted users (now information prosumers) to put their views above the need for objective facts is revealed. This chapter seeks to examine news credibility in the new media environment as it affects the processes of news production, and by extension, news itself. Research about news credibility and changing practices in journalism have heightened in recent times (Višňovský & Radošinská, 2017). This chapter will provide insight into the concept of news credibility using the backdrop of the universal journalistic ethics as it relates to the global media landscape. Also, new media use and how it has affected ethical practices of news will be brought bare, noting particular bottlenecks which have directly and/or indirectly mitigated against good journalism. In the quest to confront ethical dilemmas, this chapter will do an exploration on the need to reconsider the ethics hitherto employed in news(room) practices, while finding credible news sources of mainstream media content for a reliable future of news culture.

## **BACKGROUND**

In the field of technology, online is broadly used to describe a state of connecting to an existing networked service constructed using computers. The means through which connectivity occurs enables various computerised devices put in place to access other existing services, especially those of local area network and the internet. In more specific terms, data is stored and made available for access by users who are connected to the cyberspace using internet. At this stage, one is said to be online and can use such connectivity to carry out activities such as electronic mailing, data storing, data retrieval, information sharing, learning, and so on.

The assortment of data catalogues on the cyberspace today has enhanced information sharing among online users. According to Willis (2012), every society now needs and depends on digital infrastructures, which can be likened to as the central nervous system. This body of infrastructure makes support available for any possible activity, more for those that are technologically driven. Despite the fluidity of

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