
Donald Trump in social media

Last December, *Variety* and other news outlets reported that Donald Trump planned to serve as an executive producer for “The Celebrity Apprentice” while he was President. Kellyanne Conway, appearing on CNN, defended the President-elect’s prerogatives, but the next day Trump tweeted that the story was “fake news.” Since then, he has tweeted about fake news more than a hundred and fifty times; on a single day in September, he did so eight times, in apparent frustration over coverage of his Administration’s response to Hurricane Maria’s devastation of Puerto Rico. And, of course, Trump regularly invokes “the fake-news Russian-collusion story,” as he named it last summer. He has attacked coverage of the Russia investigation more than a dozen times on Twitter alone. “One of the greatest of all terms I’ve come up with is ‘fake,’ ” Trump said on Mike Huckabee’s talk show, in October. (In fact, the phrase “fake news” has been around for more than a century.)

The President’s strategy has been successful, however, in at least one respect: he has appropriated a term that had often been used to describe the propaganda and the lies masquerading as news, emanating from Russia and elsewhere, which proliferated on Facebook, YouTube, and other social-media platforms during the 2016 election campaign. These manufactured stories—“POPE FRANCIS SHOCKS WORLD, ENDORSES DONALD TRUMP FOR PRESIDENT,” among them—poisoned the news ecosystem and may have contributed to Trump’s victory.

Judging from the President’s tweets, his definition of “fake news” is credible reporting that he doesn’t like. But he complicates the matter by issuing demonstrably false statements of his own, which, inevitably, make news. Trump has brought to the White House bully pulpit a disorienting habit of telling lies, big and small, without evident shame. Since 2015, Politifact has counted three hundred and twenty-nine public statements by Trump that it judges to be mostly or entirely false. (In comparison, its count of such misstatements by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is thirteen.) The President also publicizes calumnies that vilify minorities. Last Wednesday morning, he outdid himself by retweeting unverified, incendiary anti-Muslim videos posted by Jayda Fransen, the deputy leader of Britain First, a far-right group. Through a spokesman, Prime Minister Theresa May responded that Trump was “wrong” to promote the agenda of a group that spreads “hateful narratives which peddle lies.” The following day, members of Parliament denounced the President, using such epithets as “fascist” and “stupid.” It was a scene without precedent in the century-old military alliance between the United States and Britain.

Trump’s tactics echo those of previous nativist-populist politicians, but his tweets also draw on the contemporary idioms of the alt-right. This is a loose movement, as the researchers Alice Marwick and Rebecca Lewis have written, best understood as “an amalgam of conspiracy theorists, techno-libertarians, white nationalists, Men’s Rights advocates, trolls, anti-feminists, anti-immigration activists, and bored young people” who express “a self-referential culture in which anti-Semitism, occult ties, and Nazi imagery can be explained either as entirely sincere or completely tongue-in-cheek.” Trump is no alt-right digital-news geek, yet his Twitter feed is similarly ambiguous. He seems to provoke his opponents for the pleasure of offending them, but when he is called to account he often claims that he was just joking. Sometimes he promotes

conspiracy theories to insult personal nemeses, as he did last week when he tweeted baseless speculation about the MSNBC host Joe Scarborough's connection to the "unsolved mystery" of an intern's death.

The President's tweets slamming CNN, the Times, NBC News, and other media organizations can be comical and weird, but they do serious harm. Last week, a Libyan broadcaster cited one of Trump's tweets about CNN in an attempt to discredit a report by the network on the persistence of slavery in that country. And, when the leader of a nation previously devoted to the promulgation of press freedom worldwide seeks so colorfully to delegitimize journalism, he inevitably gives cover to foreign despots who threaten reporters in order to protect their own power.

At home, the Trump effect is more subtle, but corrosive. The First Amendment does not appear to be in existential danger; on the Supreme Court, Justices appointed by both Republican and Democratic Presidents endorse expansive ideas about free speech, even as they debate interpretations. Yet many of the rights that working journalists enjoy stem from state laws and from the case-by-case decisions of local judges. The climate that Trump has helped create may undermine some of these protections—for example, by prompting state legislatures to overturn shield laws that encode the rights of reporters to protect confidential sources. Trump's alignment with right-wing publishers, such as Infowars and Breitbart, some of which see Fox News as the old-school communications arm of an obsolete Republican establishment, reflects a broader fragmentation of the media. Amid the cacophony of the digital era, publishers and advertisers prize readers who are deeply engaged, not just clicking around sites. News organizations as distinct as the Times and Breitbart now think of their audiences as communities in formation, bound by common values. A more openly factional, political journalism need not portend the death of fact-driven, truth-seeking, fair-minded reporting. Yet excellent journalism typically follows a form of the scientific method, prioritizing evidence, transparency, and the replicability of findings; journalism grounded in an ideology can be discredited by the practitioner's preëmptive assumptions.

Fortunately, in attacking the media Trump has in many ways strengthened it. This year, the Times, the Washington Post, and many other independent, professional enterprises have reminded the country why the Founders enshrined a free press as a defense against abusive power. Among other achievements, the media's coverage of Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation has made transparent the seriousness of its findings so far, and constrained the President's transparent desire to interfere. Last Friday, Mueller dropped his latest bombshell, a plea agreement with Michael Flynn, the former national-security adviser, who admitted that, in January, he lied to the F.B.I. about his contacts with Sergey Kislyak, then Russia's Ambassador to the United States. The court papers filed with Flynn's plea lay out a story of how senior members of the Trump transition team asked Flynn to communicate with Russian officials on matters of U.S. foreign policy. The papers also contain a reference to a discussion that Flynn had with "a very senior member" of the transition team, a characterization that suggests that the list of names of who that may be is a short one. The chances that history will remember Mueller's investigation of Trump and his closest advisers as fake news grow slimmer by the day.

Fake news has been problematic in the Philippines where social media has outsized political influence. Following the 2016 Philippine election, Senator Francis Pangilinan filed that there be an inquiry of conduct of social media platforms that allowed for the spreading of fake news.

Pangilinan called for penalties for social media platforms that provided the public with false information about his ideas. The news that came out was meant to discredit the opposing party and used social media as an outlet to bring propaganda into the mainstream media. According to media analysts, developing countries such as the Philippines, with the generally new access to social media and democracy, feel the problem of fake news to a larger extent. Facebook is one of the largest platforms being an open website, that works as a booster to sway the opinion of the public due to manufactured stories.

While Facebook provides free media sources, it does not provide its users with the access to fact checking websites. Because of this, government authorities call for a tool that will filter out "fake news" to secure the integrity of cyberspace in the Philippines. Rappler, a social news network in the Philippines, investigated online networks of Duterte supporters and discovered that they include fake news, fake accounts, bots and trolls, which Rappler thinks are being used to silence dissent. The creation of fake news, and fake news accounts on social media has been a danger to the political health of the country. According to Kate Lambie and Megha Mohan of BBC news, "What we're seeing on social media again is manufactured reality... They also create a very real chilling effect against normal people, against journalists (who) are the first targets, and they attack in very personal ways with death threats and rape threats."

Journalists are often risking their lives in publishing articles that contest fake news in the Philippines. Donald Trump during a meeting at the White House on Monday. Kevin Lamarque/Reuters President Donald Trump vented his frustration with the press and the courts in a series of tweets Tuesday morning in which he accused both institutions of deliberately undermining his agenda. The tweets reflected the president's well-known opinions on the news media and the federal court system, each a repeat target of his online attacks. At 6:35 a.m. ET on Tuesday, Trump accused the news media of publishing intentionally inaccurate stories about him and his administration in service of an "agenda of hate."

The Fake News Media has never been so wrong or so dirty. Purposely incorrect stories and phony sources to meet their agenda of hate. Sad! — Donald J. Trump June 13, 2017 While not citing any specific articles or evidence of falsehoods, he followed up an hour later with an attack on the 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals, which on Monday became the second federal appeals court to rule against his administration's blocked executive order seeking to limit travel to the US from several majority-Muslim countries. The court rested its decision in part on a tweet that Trump posted on June 5 in which he argued that the US needed a "travel ban" targeting certain "dangerous countries" to protect national security. The appeals court ruled that the ban unlawfully discriminated against people on the basis of their nationality and that the government did not show that these people would harm US interests.

On Tuesday, Trump said the court's decision was expected, and he ended his tweet on the subject with "S.C.," presumably an abbreviation for the Supreme Court. Earlier this month, the administration appealed the 4th Circuit's May decision against the ban to the Supreme Court. Well, as predicted, the 9th Circuit did it again - Ruled against the TRAVEL BAN at such a dangerous time in the history of our country. S.C. — Donald J. Trump June 13, 2017 Trump moved on to his former presidential opponent Hillary Clinton in his next tweet, accusing former Attorney General Loretta Lynch of giving Clinton a "free pass and protection" during the investigation into her use of a private email server during her tenure as secretary of state. Moving back to the media, Trump called for an apology from the press for its "incorrect" stories and said fake news was at "an all time high," though he again did not cite examples. And in

another tweet concerning his Tuesday trip to Wisconsin, he commended the "Real News" for covering his administration's job-creation efforts. Fake News is at an all time high. Where is their apology to me for all of the incorrect stories??? — Donald J. Trump June 13, 2017 In another morning message, the president wrote that Obamacare, the healthcare law officially known as the Affordable Care Act, had entered a "death spiral."

As evidence, Trump cited a misleading statistic that 2 million Americans "just dropped out" of the program and argued that "Obstructionist Democrats" were preventing Republicans from repealing and replacing the law. Trump mischaracterized a report published by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services this week that found that 2 million people since January had not paid for Obamacare insurance plans for which they had signed up. Many of those people most likely aged into Medicare or began receiving insurance coverage through an employer. 2 million more people just dropped out of ObamaCare. It is in a death spiral. Obstructionist Democrats gave up, have no answer = resist! — Donald J. Trump June 13, 2017

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