

Russell Chun and Susan J. Drucker (Eds.), **Fake News: Real Issues in Modern Communication**, New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2020, 244 pp., \$124.95 (hardcover), \$47.95 (paperback).

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At a time in our history when scarcely a day goes by without one's hearing or seeing some reference to "fake news," Russell Chun and Susan J. Drucker have done those interested in media a genuine educational service in assembling the collection of original essays appearing in ***Fake News: Real Issues in Modern Communication***. More specifically, they have illuminated what the concept entails, the matters to which it pertains, why we should be interested in the subject, the problems fake news poses, and the need for care in dealing with them.

Not surprisingly, the first chapter (Introduction) in the volume is by the editors and begins with a discussion of what they had in mind in assembling a collection of original essays in the interests of providing "a survey of technological, ethical, and legal issues raised by falsehoods, particularly social media misinformation" (p. 1). In their introductory chapter, beyond providing an overview of the invited essays, Chun and Drucker present brief discussions of the origin and definitions of the term "fake news," as well as the communication environment of primary interest, namely social media. They credit Evan Annett with a classification scheme that limits the scope of the matters the other contributors address, including disinformation for profit, political gain, and crime, as well as visual pranks (see p. 4). The remaining 11 chapters fall into three categories: (1) Theoretical and Practical Issues (chapters 2–8), (2) Case Studies (chapters 9–10), and (3) Perspectives on the Press and the Presidency (chapters 11–12).

In chapter 2, "Fake News, Collective Memory, and Political Discourse," Charles C. Self examines the potentially, and in many instances the actually, corruptive impact of fake news on collective public memory, with the concomitant effect of changing extant cultural narratives, values, and understandings by the targets of who they are, what they stand for, and what they should be willing to do in support of those seeking to seize power. Chief among the strategies of changing the narrative are intentional lies "dressed up to look like news" (p. 31) and ad hominem attacks of political opponents. Self's overview is helpful in establishing a lens through which readers can view and interpret much of what other contributors to the collection have to say concerning the subject of fake news and, in that respect, represents a useful supplement to the editors' introductory chapter. The companionship of the two chapters, moreover, adds substantially to the anthology's overall coherence.

"Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making," chapter 3, by Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, consists of selections from a comprehensive report the authors were involved in preparing for the Council of Europe. The authors seek to, among other things,



present a more refined view of what fake news comprises than have others interested in the phenomenon. In addition, they pay attention to the reasons why targets are given to sharing such information once exposed to it. Despite the impact the information in report can have on readers, this chapter might have better been placed at the end of the Theoretical and Practical Issues section as a means of more clearly indicating how our understanding of fake news, as well as how to deal with it, can be most fruitfully enlarged.

Chapter 4, "Understanding the Demand-side of Misinformation and Analyzing Solutions," is one in which author Subramaniam Vincent explores the susceptibility of targets to the influence of fake news, the exploitative capacity of technology for its creation and dissemination, and measures that may function to minimize its impact. Susceptibility to misinformation and its variants in the domain of fake news is a matter with which Vincent grapples at a neurological level in respect to the concepts of fast and slow thinking (frequently referred to as System 1 and System 2 à la Daniel Kahneman; see p. 61), and judgmental heuristics more generally, in addition to other related aspects of cognitive psychology. The discussion is one of the most, if not the most interesting but nonobvious subjects the volume addresses.

One of the editors, Russell Chun, is the author of chapter 5, "Seeing and Disbelieving: The Persuasiveness of Disinformation with Visuals and Data-Driven Images." This chapter has a strong emphasis on memes and the ways in which they contribute to the spread of misinformation in political contexts. However, the main takeaway seems to be that there is considerable misjudgment of the level of visual literacy that exists in the digital age, which, in turn, heightens vulnerability to the ill-effects of fake news. Chun urges the reader to both understand and appreciate that genuine "visual literacy demands deliberate and active acts [sic] of constructing meaning and analytical thinking" (p. 101).

James N. Cohen in chapter 6, "Mobilizing Disinformation: Digital Memes and the Weaponization of Images," continues the examination of memes and the functions they serve in spreading disinformation and other forms of fake news, especially in the context of political communication and culture. The bulk of what Cohen has to say focuses on the evolution and transformation of memes from being viewed early on as crude individual devices for conveying "an emotion or response" (p. 110) to a forum post to something more collaboratively created and widely shared. The evolution, according to Cohen, has rendered memes "perfectly set to be a weapon in misinformation and digital discord campaigns" (p. 127), and he goes into considerable detail in explaining both how and why.

The principal goal of chapter 7, "Real Digitalization, Real Regulation @ Fake News," by Susan Drucker and Gary Gumpert, is identification of the best approach to dealing with fake news. In their essay, the authors first provide a brief historical overview of the concept's connections to others having a concern with authenticity of information disseminated under the aegis of news. They also discuss efforts to ensure authenticity via regulatory means. In the end, however, Drucker and Gumpert endorse a largely laissez-faire perspective in which a free marketplace of ideas appears to provide the best means for controlling the ill and otherwise undesirable effects of fake news. That assumes, however, that those at whom fake news is directed see "the need, if not the duty, to be educated, alert, critical consumers" (p. 147). What happens if the assumption is unwarranted is not a matter Drucker and Gumpert choose to address directly.

Paul Levinson is the author of chapter 8, "Fake News Needs First Amendment Protection." In many respects, what Levinson has to say is an excellent complement to the free-marketplace-of-ideas perspective that Drucker and Gumpert espouse. However, he goes beyond them in making a cogent, as well as compelling, case for one's believing that the free-marketplace-of-ideas approach cannot function as Drucker, Gumpert, and many others would have it if freedom of expression goes unprotected.

With Winnie Thaw and Aung Kaung Myat's "Myanmar's Side of the Story: A Compound of State Manipulation of Legislation and the Usage of Fake News as a Tool of Propaganda," chapter 9, Chun and Drucker introduce the reader to the first of the two case studies they include in their anthology. To an extent greater than the essays of the other contributors, Thaw and Myat's article reveals some of the more extreme consequences that the use of fake news by those in positions of authority can have. Of particular interest are the roles it plays in the silencing and punishment of critics of the Myanmar regime, as well as the propagation of fear among those who otherwise might display opposition to its excesses, and human rights violations more generally. In these respects, the examination does much to illuminate aspects of fake news of which many readers may not even be aware, let alone fully appreciate.

Jingsi Christina Wu, in chapter 10, "Fake News or Unwanted News: Untangling the Convolutional Term of 'Fake News' in the Context of China," undertakes the task of illustrating the tendency Donald Trump has been exhibiting since 2016 of branding news he finds objectionable as "fake," but uses the People's Republic of China leadership as the exemplar. Wu's focus is on a vaccine crisis occurring in 2016 for which she explores the irony of the government's dissemination of fake news by distorting actually accurate information through censorship and other means of state control. She also notes that greater access to social media may be beginning to mitigate the situation in positive ways. The essay contains some very interesting information likely not known to most of those comprising the prospective readership and offers useful insights into the convolution to which Wu has reference. However, her development of the main ideas is at times not easy to follow and assumes a knowledge of the political culture of the PRC many may not possess.

As with the case studies, Chun and Drucker include two essays in the third and final category, Perspectives on the Press and the Presidency. The first, "Accuracy and Persuasive Uses of 'Fake News,'" chapter 11, by Richard E. Vatz, does not live up to the expectations one might have from its title. There is relatively little attention to specific instances of fake news as such. The essay comes across more as a sort of op-ed to the effect that certain presumably liberal media have not been very kind to President Trump. The title, in addition to containing a seeming oxymoron, that is, "Accuracy . . . of 'Fake News,'" would seem to call for a more expansive overview and cataloging of "persuasive uses" of fake news via coverage of a sample of presidents, not merely Donald Trump, both as purveyors and victims.

The twelfth and final chapter in the anthology, "The Truth under Attack," by Joseph Peyronnin, explores in erudite fashion some rather sinister implications of fake news, especially as it has become increasingly in evidence as a publicly acknowledged concept and related phenomenon in the relatively recent past. Of particular concern to Peyronnin in his essay is the frequent identification by public figures of the press as "fake news" and its "corrosive effect on journalism" (p. 221). The supreme irony in such a set of circumstances is that the accusers are often guilty of precisely what they accuse their targets of doing—

namely, functioning as purveyors of “fake news.” Missing in illustrations, such as the ones Peyronnin includes in his essay, is evidence of any apparent regard for the truth of the allegations, let alone respect for it. Hence, while acknowledging the efforts of traditional news organizations “to speak truth to power” (p. 232), Peyronnin cautions that it is nonetheless important that media consumers “always be skeptical about what they read or hear, especially on social media sites,” . . . “look at more than one news source,” . . . and “try to be media literate” (p. 232). Such observations provide a fitting way to bring not only Peyronnin’s essay to a close, but the complete volume of essays as well.