The Fake News Assignment for
How We Know What We Know

Team Assignment 2
Summer 2018

Date: June 25
Due: July 2 at 11:59 p.m.

Why Are You Doing the Assignment?

The purpose of this assignment is to understand the nature, structure, and impact of fake news on the information environment. Specifically, the assignment will allow you to:

1. Understand how, and why, fake news is created.
2. Examine the rhetorical appeal of fake news.
3. Develop the knowledge to analyze news and determine if it is fake.

How You Will Do the Assignment

The assignment will be done by your team in a post format on our How We Know website. Each team has template in the Pending Review section named “Fake News: Team _ _ (team number). Every team member has access to the post, just as he or she did for the Ghost in the Shell assignment.

As with the Ghost assignment, teams can use any approach, provided it is clear who did what (i.e., if you aren’t writing on the website, indicate your responsibilities, or there will be no way to evaluate your individual contribution).

Make sure your post includes a list of credits that notes the specific job of each active team member. Take advantage of the multimedia features of WordPress: use images, videos, memes, and other media to buttress and enhance the written text.

If you have any questions, email professor Ottolenghi at ottoleng@fiu.edu!

The Assignment

Create a fake news article of about 500-750 words. This may seem a simple thing to do. It is not. The creation of a fake news story is, in some ways, more difficult than creating a real news story. You must know your target audience, its likes and its prejudices.

The content must be startling enough to draw and hold the reader’s attention, but not so outlandish as to be quickly disbelieved. The article must be carefully crafted to appear real when it is not. As Michael Schudson noted, “good” fake news mimics real news.
The key to this assignment is to analyze successful fake news articles and see what makes them work. Then, apply those principles to your own article. Review the PowerPoint video presentation and readings on WordPress.

**Resources**

The following approach may prove useful:

1. Find and analyze some fake news articles. Who were they written for? How were they constructed? Who was their intended audience? What made them interesting to that audience? The Snopes website Hot 50 has good examples of trending fake news:


   Buzzfeed examined the 50 most popular fake news stories of 2016 on Facebook:


2. Understand how successful fake news entrepreneurs do it. The Toronto Star profiled the rise of two itinerant college grads who became fake news media moguls:


3. Understand the characteristics of fake news, and work those principles into your own article. This key to this assignment is “reverse-engineering”. Take fake news articles apart, see how they work, and then build your own. The FactCheck.org guide on how to spot fake news is useful for understanding how fake news works:


4. Finally, the University of Arizona has a guide that provides a good overview:

   [http://libguides.library.arizona.edu/newsliteracy](http://libguides.library.arizona.edu/newsliteracy)

In your post, include a reflective paragraph explaining how and why you wrote the article:

1. What was your rhetorical appeal?
2. Who was your intended audience?
3. What was the “hook” to lure in readers?
4. How did you grab the reader’s attention and still maintain credibility?

The paragraph does not count against your 750-word limit.

Remember, a good fake news story is more than a story that’s not true. It’s something that will be read, go viral, and gain the largest audience possible.