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Fake news and democracy

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The term “fake news” in itself is not new at all. “Fake news” and disinformation themselves are even older: Octavian’s propaganda campaign against Mark Antony (44/31 b.C) is an ancient example. A Council of Europe report highlights that latterly, thanks to the Internet and social media, everyone can create and distribute content in real-time.
The term “fake news” became ubiquitous since the 2016 US presidential

elections.
https://www.thelocal.it/20180307/impact-fake-news-social-media-russia-italian-election-result. “Fake news” has been variably used to refer to more or less every form of problematic, false, misleading, or partisan content. In time developments in technology, such as the invention of the printing press, enabled a faster, easier dissemination of information, including disinformation. In 1835, The Sun of New York published 6 articles about the discovery of life on the Moon, in what is now remembered as the “Great Moon Hoax”. In 1898, the USS Maine exploded for unclear causes, but American newspapers pointed to Spain, contributing to the start of a Spanish-American War.

There are various dangers in fake news and notably medical misinformation poses a threat to health; climate-related conspiracy theories pose a threat to the environment. Disinformation may continue to shape people’s attitudes even when controverted , and thus has “real and negative effects on the public consumption of news”.
According to a study by David N. Rapp and Nikita A. Salovich, vulnerability to inaccurate information can create confusion even when prior knowledge and experience should protect readers from considering and using it, and people show dependence on inaccurate information even after reading fiction, or after conversations with people they have no particular reason to trust.

More generally, “fake news” pollutes the information ecosystem: information is “as vital to the healthy functioning of communities as clean air, safe streets, good schools, and public health”. News is the raw material of good citizenship.
Distrust may be a by-product of ordinary misinformation, but some disinformation campaigns are explicitly aimed not at convincing someone of something, but at spreading uncertainty, sowing mistrust and confusion. As explained in the report Lexicon of Lies, these campaigns are sometimes called “gaslighting”,

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a term originally used in psychology.
It is, however, important to note that mistrust is not only a consequence, but also a cause of disinformation: people turn to disinformation media because they do not trust mainstream media. This further increases distrust, and media distrust becomes a self-perpetuating phenomenon.
People who distrust the media are less likely to access accurate information. They will vote along partisan lines rather than consider the facts. The media are not able to perform their watchdog function and this poses a danger to democracy.
“Fake news” accusations can also become a weapon in the hand of authoritarian regimes: an Article 19 report underlines that world leaders use them to attack
openly the media.

Bericht online lesen: https://moto-gp.en-a.de/politik/fake_news_and_democracy-73499/

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