

## **The Strategy of Temptation: The Foundation of Fake News**

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### **Abstract**

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*Today Fake News is all the rage in politics. The truth be known fake news is nothing new. It has been around for centuries. However, like many words or terms it has taken on another modern meaning. Fake news is based on the three principles of the Strategy of Temptation. This article shows how the Strategy of Temptation's three principles of Doubt, Lie/Lying/Deception, and a Promise ... of good? have been applied to the news that has created so much consternation in everyday life. The article provides a history of fake news and how it unfolds.*

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**Key Words:** Fake News, Lie, Lying, Doubt, Promise, Discernment, Cognitive Dissonance

### **Fake News**

Fake news is false, often sensational, misinformation disseminated under the guise of news reporting, historically used to describe intentionally fabricated news stories

(<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/fake-news>). The printing and dissemination of spurious news is hardly new, but the term fake news is. And it is spreading. Reports from the Pew Research Center indicate that as high as 67% of Americans get their news coverage from non-edited social media sites (<http://www.journalism.org/2017/09/07/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2017/>), that 78% of Twitter followers get their news from that site and that 58% of Americans favor free speech over government intervention to restrict fake news (<http://www.journalism.org/>).

However, when we say that an English word is “new,” we are using a broader meaning of that word than if we were to refer to, say, a musical genre. Fake news appears to have begun seeing general use at the end of the 19th century. Once upon a time “fake news” had a precise meaning. It referred to total fabrications — made-up stories and, in the 1800’s, was referred to as “hoax news”.

One of the reasons that fake news is such a recent addition to our vocabulary is that the word fake is also fairly young. Fake was little used as an adjective prior to the late 18th century. But we obviously had fake news before the 1890s, so what did we call it? There was doubtless a wide range of expressions that people have resorted to when they felt the need to indicate that the newspapers had been fibbing, but one of the most common ones was false news or hoax news

Today it is used to defend an illogical position. Fake news is a way to avoid using critical thinking skills when a news source does not match a personal or ideological bias such as any news reported by mainstream media which is deemed unflattering and/or incriminating regardless of its actual factualness or validity. Fake news should also be distinguished from false news, also called dishonest news or lies that are told for political purposes.

You would think it's easy to tell fake news from real news but actually, no. It's not that readers are stupid it's that the news format is easy to imitate and some true stories are outlandish enough to beg belief. The news sometimes takes "literary license" and prints false and sometimes sensationalist information presented as fact and published and spread on the internet. (Fake news 1-5, 2018).

The *Washington Post* cautions that a report qualifies as fake news if it requires a correction or the use of an overly broad definition unfairly attaches malicious intent to the kinds of mistakes that inevitably appear in good-faith journalism (Fake news 6, 2018).

In Dictionary.com's next update, the online reference will add a definition for the term *fake news*: ***fake news***: *false news stories, often of a sensational nature, created to be widely shared online for the purpose of generating ad revenue via web traffic or discrediting a public figure, political movement, company, etc.* (Fake news 7, 2018).

### **The Strategy of Temptation**

Fake news is based on the Strategy of Temptation which has three principles: Doubt, Lie/Lying/Deception, and a Promise ... of good? The following defines the three principles and how once these principles are applied it is sometimes hard to tell fake news from the truth.

#### **Doubt**

If you have doubt or doubts about something, you suspect the certainty as to whether the report is true or even possible. Doubt is defined as an uncertain opinion or a lack of confidence. It makes you unsure, undecided, or to disbelieve. It may be fake news if it causes the reader to feel distrust, be skeptical and/or be fearful or suspicious of the report.

#### Lying/Deception

Lying is any communicative act that aims to cause the listener of the communication to adopt, or persist in, a false belief. However, this definition invites questions about its key terms. There is no universally accepted definition of lying. Rather, there exists a spectrum of views ranging from those that exclude most forms of deception from the category of lying to those that treat *lying* and *deception* as different words for the same phenomena (Smith, 2018). As you can see from Smith (2018) there is no universally accepted definition of lying to others. Therefore lies/lying/deception are perfect for a principle in the Strategy of Temptation.

#### **Deception**

Whereas lying is to persuade someone that a false belief is true or that a true belief is false, deception involves persuading someone that something false is the truth, or to keep the truth hidden from someone for your own advantage. There is intent in deception, whereas lying can be a persuasive statement just to have someone else believe that which is not true.

#### **Promise**

The third part of the Strategy of Temptation model is the promise. A promise is to tell someone that you will certainly do something or that something will definitely happen. Promises generally include results favorable to the reader but not necessarily good for the object of the promise. Promises generally include an "if-then" type statement, such as "if this story is true, then this is what will happen".

### **Application of the Strategy of Temptation**

Once the three principles of the strategy of temptation have been established, fake news takes on a life of its own through repetition. This happens through multiple media and sources saying the same thing. Today with 24/7 news the veracity of a statement is accepted once it hits the airways. The viewers of the news see a supposition of truth through this repetition. That supposition is manifest when there are two sides to the issue or two or more groups espousing the issue.

Fake news is meant to create cognitive dissonance. Gibson (1992) defines 'dissonance' as a marked difference between an event or events and the description of it in words or behavior. People have a varying tolerance for dissonance according to genetics and early childhood. A person with a low tolerance for dissonance will be unable to fit his/her experiences into convenient conventions or rigid categories. As varied experiences conflict and clash, a new personal vision of reality must emerge if these dissonances are to be resolved.

Discernment is the process of distinguishing between use and abuse. When we make decisions, they pertain to many things such as money, food, drugs, time, etc. (needless to say this is not an all-inclusive list). Our decisions are primarily in two categories': use and abuse. Cognitive dissonance comes from a misplaced focus on the use and abuse argument. This either-or logical fallacy is a type of fallacy in which a person makes a statement that presents only two possible options, when there are actually more than those two. This type of fallacy is often made by someone attempting to persuade someone else into believing that only two options exist therefore creating a situation that can lead to cognitive dissonance. This approach is dogmatic (Akpan, Beard, & Notar, 2018).

### **Conclusion**

As you can see the Strategy of Temptation works well in selling fake news. It is part of everyday life being applied directionally. The process of discernment is woefully lacking in the education system at all levels. Because of this fake news has a fertile field.

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