

Fake News

Winner of *The Measure's* Award for “Best Visual Presentation in Posters” at the Elliott T. Bowers Honor’s College Undergraduate Research Symposium, April 2017.

Anne Galloway

Faculty Introduction

Dr. Brian Blackburne

Anne Galloway shrewdly provides us with both an assessment of trends in reporting news and social commentary through her visual presentation. Galloway couples her refined rhetorical sensibility with a desire to explore (and challenge) conventional forms of presenting academic research posters. Using advanced techniques in document design and image manipulation, Galloway honed her ideas through peer review and usability assessment until she achieved the slick, tabloid-looking design that we see here. From acquiring special typefaces to abandoning celebrity photos that were not in the Creative Commons, Galloway elevates her argument to an eye-catching, engaging design that extends beyond the aesthetics of this poster. By focusing on key persuasive devices, Galloway empowers us to view common news-reporting tactics through an important, critical lens.

Abstract

This poster and critical introduction aim to illuminate the ways in which gossip media has bled into news reporting to gain a larger audience. This practice is demonstrated through the explanation of common rhetorical tools employed by gossip media, such as suspicious sources, celebrity ethos, and suspension of disbelief. The consequence of this transference of styles is that audience members may not be able to distinguish between fact and opinion, and therefore may not be able to reach their own conclusions. The discussion continues by illustrating how these methods have translated into news delivery through the use of clickbait on websites and editorialized versions of facts given through talk shows.

This research illuminates how the rhetorical style of gossip media has bled into the style of news reporting in order to gain more audience members. The worst-case scenario of this can be seen in websites that post editorial pieces that masquerade as fact. With fake news stories sometimes more widely circulated on social media sites than legitimate news stories (Allcott and Gentzko, 2017), traditional news outlets have begun to adopt many of the sensational tactics used by gossip media outlets and tabloids. This practice results in news stories that may include the personal opinion of the journalist overshadowing actual facts, skewed facts that cater to a certain audience, or conclusions on issues that are not fully understood. The consequences of these actions are significant because audience members may not be able to distinguish between fact and opinion, obscuring their ability to reach their own logical conclusions.

To understand the way that gossip rhetoric has influenced news media, one must first understand the fundamental rhetorical tools used by tabloids. The three key tools tabloids use are suspension of disbelief, suspicious sources, and celebrity ethos. Suspension of disbelief is a key rhetorical device that plays into every other rhetorical device

“Gossip magazines are inherently entertaining, so the average audience will suspend its disbelief of the information even though these magazines are writing about real people and events.”

employed by gossip magazines. A term coined by Samuel Coleridge, suspension of disbelief refers to the tendency of an audience to discard their questioning of the legitimacy of an item in exchange for its entertainment value (“Suspension of Disbelief”).

Gossip magazines are inherently entertaining, so the average audience will suspend its disbelief of the information even though these magazines are writing about real people and events. News companies have always recognized the correlation between entertainment news and high viewership. A person can go to any news website and find a section devoted purely to entertainment news. Such reporting is not a new concept connected to the internet. Television newscasts have time slots dedicated to entertainment stories, and the same applies to newspapers. The issue that arises from suspension of disbelief is not the entertainment value of the articles themselves, but the state of mind in which they place their audience. If someone has been reading

article after article about the Kardashians and then clicks on an article pertaining to actual news, she or he might not notice if something sounds a little far-fetched.

Drawing upon suspicious sources is another rhetorical device used by tabloids. More times than not, gossip magazines use anonymous sources for their information, all under the guise of confidentiality. In any other context, such reporting would be unacceptable, but in the tabloid context, people are unconcerned with the source of the material. Gossip magazines use the reader's apathetic feelings toward legitimate sources to their advantage, saying whatever they want and then using their anonymous source as a scapegoat if ever actually questioned. Suspicious sources tie into another device that the news media has adopted from gossip sites: clickbait. Clickbait is a link to a website with an enticing, often misleading headline meant to get people to visit a website they would not normally visit. This tactic is similar to the headlines used on gossip magazines. As a *Pew Center Report* (2016) found, sixty-two percent of adults rely on social media to get their news. Conventional news sources have jumped on the bandwagon and frequently use clickbait as well.

Celebrity ethos is the third rhetorical device employed by gossip magazines. Magazines use celebrities' fame to sell their products. People may buy a gossip magazine just because their favorite celebrity is on the cover, even if they were not intending to buy a magazine in the first place. This tactic relies on the ethos of the celebrity rather than the quality of the magazine itself. The celebrity takes the time to cultivate the image that they project in order to garner a fan base, and the magazine essentially just steals their hard work. This rhetorical device ties into news media through the editorialization of news and the audience's preference to be told what to think. As evidenced by the high volume of talk shows, people like to hear other people's opinions. They see these television hosts as reliable sources of information, and the hosts use this ethos to influence their audience. This tactic does not always have to be negative, since the sharing of opinion and insight helps facilitate discourse. That said, the issue that arises from this editorialization of news is that there is no opportunity for discussion; therefore, the information becomes very one sided.

With this in mind, my main goal for the audience after viewing my

poster is to walk away with an awareness of the potential deception in news reporting and to become a more conscious consumer, not only with news, but with all forms of media. ■

NEWS

Fake

3 Signs
of
He's Leading You On
Inside this Issue!



News Sources
Selling Out?



Gossip Rhetoric
101



Breitbart:
Playing Pretend

EXCLUSIVE!

The Gossip Effect

WHAT'S INSIDE

On The Cover

NEWS SOURCES SELLING OUT

- Entertainment News Big Bucks
- Click Bait
- No Personal Opinion? No Problem!

GOSSIP RHETORIC 101

- Suspension of Disbelief
- Suspicious Sources
- Celebrity Ethos

BREITBART: PLAYING PRETEND

- The Future of News?
- No Separation from Truth and Opinion

Special Issue

3 SIGNS YOU'RE BEING LED TO

(By The News Anchor!)

- "I Think..."
- Skewed Facts
- Clear Conclusion

Bibliography

- Allcott, H., & Gentzkow, M. (2017). Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(2), 211-236. doi:10.3386/w23089
- Breitbart.com. (2014). *Logo of Breitbart* [digital image]. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons website: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BB-logo-highres.jpg>
- Coleridge, S. T. (1898). *Biographia literaria: Or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*. London: Bell and Daldy.
- E! News. (2014). *Current Logo for E! News* [digital image]. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons website: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:E!_News_current_logo.png
- Fox News Channel. (2014). *Fox News Logo* [digital image]. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons website: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fox_News_Channel_logo.png
- Francis, G. (Photographer). (2011). *Kim Kardashian Fragrance Launch* [digital image]. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons website: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kim_Kardashian_2011.jpg
- Gottfried, Jeffrey, and Elisa Shearer. 2016. "News Use across Social Media Platforms 2016." Pew Research Center, May 26. <http://www.journalism.org/2016/05/26/news-use-acrosssocial-media-platforms-2016>.

Student Biography

Anne Galloway is a recent graduate of Sam Houston State University. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English in Spring 2017. As a creative writing minor, Anne did not think rhetorical research was one of her strong suits. However, under the guidance of technical writing faculty advisor, Dr. Brian Blackburne, she created an academic poster that combined her interest in popular media and the current political climate with practical analytical and technical writing skills. She plans to pursue graduate studies in English in the near future.