False News: A Historical Perspective

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When did misleading news begin?

Misleading false news is not a new phenomenon.
The Printing Press

- Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1439.
- The printing press allowed information to be spread widely and rapidly.
Science vs. Religion

- Galileo Galilei’s heliocentric theory, the Earth and other planets orbit the sun, was challenged by the church. He was summoned to an inquisition in Rome by Pope Urban VIII in 1632.

- He was found “vehemently suspect of heresy”.

Heliocentric: sun is at the center of the solar system
Galileo’s heliocentric theory was proven to be true but the church held the power to control public discourse.
1782, Benjamin Franklin fabricated a story in a real Boston newspaper, the *Independent Chronicle*, about King George’s gruesome crime of scalping children, women, and men.

He also composed a fake letter from a real naval hero, John Paul Jones, urging Americans to unite and declare independence.
Benjamin Franklin’s fabrication was driven by his desire to gather momentum among the Americans to fight for independence.

At that time, writing and publishing were exclusive to the educated intelligentsia and those who had the money and power.
First Newspapers in America

- The first newspapers were funded by political party NOT ads. Newspapers were dependent upon partisan support and readership. It was almost like a wing or mechanism of political parties to spread ideas.

- At that time, almost all newspapers were partisan.
Yellow Journalism

A type of journalism that is not based on truth or research, uses eye-catching headlines to sell papers and make a profit.
“You will furnish the picture, I will furnish the war”
Ethics of Journalism

James Gordon Bennett (1835) established new standards for journalism by utilizing interviews and observations to add details to news stories. Most importantly, his newspaper was funded by advertisers instead of political parties that enabled the newspaper to report stories on corruption and criticize politicians openly.
June 17th, 1972 - 5 men broke into the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate office which subsequently revealed that Nixon was illegally tapping the DNC’s classified conversations.
The Media and Watergate

The story of Watergate gained national attention through reporting by the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. Two prominent journalists in the investigation were Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward of the *Post*. The Watergate Scandal was a catalyst for a public recognition of the importance of investigative journalism and the responsibility of the press to check the powerfuls.
21st Century

It wasn’t until the rise of web-generated news that our era’s journalistic norms were seriously challenged, and fake news became a powerful force again.

Digital news has brought *yellow journalism* back. Algorithms that create news feeds have no regard for accuracy and objectivity.
Technology transformed the speed of information delivery. Today, footages could be instantly streamed on Facebook and YouTube that allowed us to be more informed first-handedly.

But technology is a double edge sword. Anyone can generate news not based on facts. Divisive ads on Facebook and Twitter accounts reached millions of people that potentially swayed the 2016 election.
What’s the role of social media in journalism?

Should we hold technology companies to a higher standard in terms of publishing contents online?
How False News Can Spread