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Fake News? Know the Source, Question Motivation Behind Stories

By Gerrod Lambrecht
UCF Forum columnist
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When was the first time you heard the term “fake news”? For me it was right after last year’s presidential election.

I feel like I consume a great deal of both political and business news, and for me this was a term that I had not heard in the mainstream media narrative prior to the election.

Immediately after the election, it appeared as though top party leaders had a new talking point: fake news. The intent seemed to begin a new narrative about how “media” or “news” needed to be run through an appointed truth filter. Now to me that is scary stuff.

Some in the political spectrum began applying the term to what is generally called the mainstream media. Within days of the discussion of vetting the “truthiness” of Facebook posts, the conversation pivoted to the mainstream media being called out as fake news. CNN, NYT, AP – you name the organization – it was now being classified as fake news by some.

I was thinking about an old George Carlin line when writing this: “Bipartisan usually means that a larger-than-usual deception is being carried out.”

These days, it seems nothing is bipartisan. Everything appears to be “hyper-partisan.” In this environment, my opinion has become that everything is a deception of some kind.

Some media outlets are more obvious in their methodology and ethos and political leanings, while some others are less obvious, even though there still may be an intent behind what is presented. Does anyone consume the 6 p.m. news anymore? I don’t because it seems that more and more they tend to be leaning toward the ends of the spectrum.

For years it seems like the division between editorial/political opinion and news has been breaking down. What happened to the days of news coverage such as when Tim Russert hosted *Meet the Press*? Call me nostalgic, but when I watched Russert I felt he equally grilled both sides, and I could never really tell where he stood ideologically.

Even if you look at content aggregators such as the Drudge Report, you still have to understand that everything presented has a purpose. I do not put Drudge in this category, but some of the worst news out there these days is on aggregation click-bait sites.

I decided a while back that I would consume a good portion of my news from people I felt were intelligent, antithetical ideologically and obvious in their presentation – such as Rush Limbaugh and Rachel Maddow.

Why? Pretty simple really: to understand the other point of view, get information not generally put forth by the other side, and gain insight into narrative creation. Even though it makes me want to throw things at the screen sometimes, it is more beneficial to articulate your opposition as opposed to nodding in agreement.

If you can always be looking for and questioning the motivation behind the news, understand the social narrative they are trying to create, read the tea leaves, think for yourself, and articulate a position, I believe that you will be much better off.

I think that informed people need to look at what is labeled as alternate news now, as well. *Zero Hedge*, *WikiLeaks*, *Mother Jones*, and *Vice* to name a few. I do not believe that the intentions of these organizations are any more pure than mainstream organizations, but I do believe that I see news here that I will not see anywhere else.

RT, the Russian 24-hour English news channel, is considered by many as a propaganda arm of the Russian government. But does that mean their content should not be consumed? As long as I understand who owns RT, can't I watch and still learn things? I have seen some of the best economic reporting out there on RT in the past few years.

Maybe the only pure source of news that exists anymore is the *National Enquirer*!

My approach may not be the right one, but I start from the position that everything I hear is false and question why I am being presented with the information. What is the motivation behind the presentation? What do they want me to buy or support?

Sad and depressing environment? Maybe, but if we can ever get back to a discussion as opposed to a fight, we will be better off.

As Carlin said: "I got this real moron thing I do. It's called thinking and I'm not a very good American because I like to form my own opinions...I have certain rules I live by...and I don't take very seriously the media or the press in this country."

I really don't share many of Carlin's views, but I sure liked the way his mind worked.

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