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FAKE NEWS AND SCANDAL

by

Jason Cabañes, C.W. Anderson and Jonathan Corpus Ong

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Introduction

Can we draw a connection between the academic literature of political scandal and the recent explosion of interest in the use, dissemination, and impact of “fake news” in the public sphere since 2016? As one of us has argued (Boczkowski and Anderson 2017), it is increasingly important to integrate new-fangled intellectual concepts like fake news with more venerable theories and understanding from classic media sociology. In this chapter we attempt such an integration.

In the first section we argue that there are four ways we both understand and **misunderstand** fake news as a research concept. This includes seeing fake news as text rather than visual content; as either “true” or “false” information rather than as facts embedded within narratives; as surface level content rather than being produced within institutional processes; and from a “Western-centric” lens rather than from a comparative context. As we will argue in our conclusion, these foci make connecting empirical work on fake news to larger media theories of visibility and surveillance more difficult. In particular, they make it harder to connect questions of fake news to sociologies of scandal and the public sphere. In the second section, we attempt to address each of these critiques by outlining elements of our research on fake news production in the Philippines, which was selected insofar as it provides a non-European case of a phenomenon the discussion of which is usually confined to the industrialized West and which serves as a launching pad for engaging in larger meta-theoretical reflection at the conclusion of the chapter. In this research, we looked into the belly of the beast, conducting interviews and doing participant observation with the so-called “political trolls” in order to grasp the dynamics of the country’s hierarchical but

networked architecture of disinformation. We paid particular attention to how the creative labor within this architecture gave rise to visual images that carried particular narrative and aesthetic components, which aimed to reinforce the public's feelings of anger and resentment and harness the infectious zeal of political supporters. In the third and final section, the chapter returns to the initial conversation about the media and scandal and discusses how these different frameworks for considering fake news shed light on the relationship between scandal and the media.

One final note before we move into the heart of this chapter. There is growing and justified resistance in academia to using the term “fake news” to describe content that deliberately uses the tools and distribution mechanisms of journalism to promote demonstrably false narratives. Wardle (2017) has convincingly argued that the use of the term collapses multiple distinct types of misinformation (some malicious, some benign) into a single category called “fake news.” Others (Tandoc et. al. 2018) have categorized the diverse and often divergent definitions of fake news that have been deployed in the scholarly literature. Still others contend that the use of “fake news” by the U.S. President Donald J. Trump has transformed the concept into an utterly vacuous one, a concept often used to criticize legitimate accountability journalism and one increasingly deployed by authoritarian leaders of all stripes.

We agree in principle with all these criticisms. And yet, in this chapter, we continue to use the term “fake news.” Our decision here is primarily one of authorial strategy. In essence, it is entirely possible to spend thousands of words arguing about the proper definition of “fake news” and spend very little time conducting empirical work about the phenomenon, or thinking more deeply about the ways it has been used in research to date. To avoid definitional parsing, we deploy the term “fake news” here while agreeing entirely with the criticism that its use is problematic. At the very least, accepting the common usage of the term “fake news” allows us to turn more quickly to some of the ways it has been used, and misused, and under-used in academic research so far. Thinking about fake news in terms of intellectual misunderstandings or oversights allows us also to connect it with larger theories of scandal, media, and the public sphere.

Four misunderstandings of fake news

We argue that there are four ways to understand and *misunderstand* fake news as a research concept. First, we often think of fake news as words on a page rather than images or other forms

of visual content. Second, we often become intellectually trapped between trying to distinguish between journalism as “true” or “false” information, when it might be more productive to think of journalism as facts embedded within narratives. Third, we often think about the content of fake news itself—what it says and what it does to the public—rather than considering the institutional processes by which fake news is produced. Finally, we often fail to consider fake news in a comparative context, which has the added advantage of promoting a highly “Western-centric” notion of the idea of fake news.

Emotional, aesthetic and visual aspects of fake news

In recent years, experts in the United Kingdom, Europe, and the United States seem increasingly mystified by the decisions made by voters—decisions that appear to upend expectations about what are the “best” possible political actions, or at least the most rational ones. While not put quite this straightforwardly, journalistic and scholarly explanations for these so-called “irrational political choices” have gone something like this: building on a variety of digital affordances, the information environment that is powering the political public sphere in the West has become overwhelmed by a variety of propagandistic, divisive, and emotionally resonant (but factually untrue) forms of information. The presence of this (mis)information led to particular political outcomes, outcomes in part attributable to the impact of media on individual voters. In the most common version of this story, Facebook (and, to a lesser degree, Twitter) allowed a series of propagandistic and untrue pieces of information to flood its systems and lead people to make the “wrong choice” when the time came to vote for a president or make a choice in a national referendum. More legacy newspapers and media outlets, particularly in the United Kingdom, have also come under fire for “playing the fear card” when it comes to their coverage of important issues.

Bundled into this story are a particular (and interrelated) set of assumptions about the nature of politics, the affordances of digital media, and the manner in which information affects human behavior. There are three problems with these assumptions. First, they rely on a set of theories about what the media “does” to audiences that have been widely debunked in the communications literature. Second, they have a narrow understanding of “the media” that sees that media as made up of relatively unitary pieces of informational content. This understanding ignores the aesthetic content of the media, and indeed relegates the entire concept of visual news media to a second-tier

status. Both these problems create a third, which is that we too often talk about the relationship between media and politics in narrow, overly social scientific terms, ignoring the range of other intellectual perspectives that could be brought to bear on these relationships.

We have noted that one major perspective missing from the conversation about fake news has been a visual aesthetic perspective, one that draws more on concepts from art history and art appreciation than it does from social science or even from media studies. The major work on the role of visual content in contributing to the fake news phenomenon (e.g. Guy 2017) has largely been exploratory in nature; beyond that, it has largely adopted a behaviorist perspective on fake news, looking at what images “do” to the public and how to identify them as being either fake or true. This, however, is not the only way to think about visuals in journalism. In just the last few years visual communication scholars and social semioticians have become more broadly interested in the aesthetics of news media, specifically with regards to the relationship between imagery, graphics, layout, and writing in a digital context. In particular, Helen Caple, David Machin, and Hartmut Stöckl have offered compelling social semiotic analyses of key visual and multimodal news media genres like, for example, online news galleries, newsbites, and news opening sequences. There is no reason why these perspectives could not be brought to bear on the question of fake news.

Truth, lies and narratives

While media and communications scholars have looked primarily at news as information and have built compelling arguments about the poisoning of the public well by fake news, a few sociologists have devoted themselves to understanding the *cultural, emotional, and narrational* roots of the current “crisis in public communication” (Blumler and Guerevitch 1995). Arlie Hochschild’s work on the “deep story” in *Strangers in Their Own Land*—the way that the story Tea Party activists in Louisiana told themselves about the current state of American political and economic life influenced their political choices—has been central to this conversation. For Hochschild (2016), the roots of the populist upsurge in politics do not lie in economic distress as much as they lie in a *story about* economic distress. Conservatives in the United States imagine social life as a line, at the end of which is something called the “American Dream.” Not only has this line slowed to a crawl, in the minds of these Trump supporters, but a variety of minority groups and immigrants have been cutting to the front of the line, aided and abetted by corrupt and swindling politicians.

What lies at the root of populism, for Hochschild, is not the deployment of incorrect facts but rather the construction of particular mediated narratives. In terms more familiar to scholars of communication, journalism, and media studies, journalism and news—whether fake or truthful—play a ritualistic role in constructing the everyday lives of citizens, and not simply an informational role. News, in James W. Carey's terms, can be seen as a dramaturgical exercise. "What is arrayed before the reader is not pure information but a portrayal of the contending forces in the world," Carey wrote in 1985. "Moreover, as readers make their way through the paper, they engage in a continual shift of roles or of dramatic focus." Fake news, it can be argued, helps establish these terms of dramatic reference and a vision of the world in which contending forces of good and evil populate a world of conflict, treachery, scandal, and betrayal. While such a ritualistic perspective does not dispense with the difference between "facts" and "lies," it de-emphasizes the importance of truth as the sole vector along which we ought to analyze fake news and digital propaganda.

Fake news as content, fake news as production

Little attention, finally, has been devoted to the means by which fake news is actually made and by which it operates as a form of cultural labor.

For instance, a timely BuzzFeed analysis in early November 2016 (Silverman 2016) determined that "fake news" on Facebook generated significantly larger amounts of audience engagement than the top stories of the 19 most popular traditional news organizations combined. The Computational Propaganda Project at the Oxford Internet Institute, which actually began well before the 2016 election, has generated studies about a wide variety of disinformation campaigns in cross-national contexts, beginning with the analysis of "Brexit Bots" on Twitter and later expanding the analysis to include bot activity and propaganda on Facebook, Wikipedia, and elsewhere. These studies are incredibly valuable as well as being methodologically sophisticated; they demonstrate the degree to which misinformation and outright propaganda have colonized the journalistic space and hypothesize a causal connection between the irrationality of our current political discourse and the actions of malevolent information actors (e.g., Bradshaw & Howard 2017; Wooley & Guilbeault 2017). A related 2016 American election study, carried out by the Berkman-Klein Center at Harvard University, looks at the interactions between hundreds of media outlets and the patterns of information circulation that dominated election coverage. The study concludes that, while centrist/liberal media in the United States are now virtually synonymous with legacy media outlets

like the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and CNN, conservative media space is dominated by a variety of dubious quasi-journalistic actors, particularly Breitbart News. Much like the work on computational propaganda, however, the Berkman study looks at surface-level media interactions and conceives of “news content” as primarily “information” (Farris et. al 2017). More than that, all these studies examine the work that this content does in the world, and the way it affects citizens. Survey-based approaches may also tend to flatten out differences when they draw false equivalences among disinformation actors and content as they manifest in diverse cultural contexts (e.g., Bradshaw & Howard 2017) while technology-centric approaches may fetishize new technologies and overstate their social effects without situating these within broader media environments and historical campaign infrastructures (e.g., Woolley & Guilbeault 2017).

Digital disinformation in the Philippines

To demonstrate concretely how these under-explored aspects of fake news might be analyzed as part of a larger analysis of the relationship between fake news and scandal, this section deploys them in discussing the study that two of us carried out on the production of digital disinformation in the Philippines (Ong and Cabañes 2018). This research was conducted from December 2016 to December 2017, in the aftermath of the campaigns for the May 2016 Philippine national elections, which saw the intensification of online political vitriol and toxicity and the rise of controversial politician Rodrigo Duterte to the country’s presidency. To shed light on the worrisome dynamics of digital disinformation in the campaigns and in the early days of the Duterte regime, we conducted in-depth interviews with 20 of those we refer to as disinformation architects who did “political trolling” and produced “fake news” for politicians across the Philippines’ political spectrum and at both the national and local levels. This included six chief disinformation architects who were elite advertising and PR strategists managing digital disinformation campaigns, five anonymous digital influencers who were aspirational middle-class digital workers operating anonymous accounts that commanded followers of 50,000 and above on Facebook and Twitter, and nine community-level fake account operators who were precarious middle-class digital workers sharing and amplifying core campaign messages in the online communities and Facebook groups they had infiltrated. To supplement these interviews, we also conducted participant observations of over 20 publicly accessible Facebook groups and pages and Twitter accounts supporting various political camps—including those that were explicitly pro- and anti-Duterte—

as well as those that had no explicit representation of candidates or political parties, but who claimed to curate “social media news.”

Disinformation as a visual

One innovation we proposed for how to conceptualize fake news in research better was for us to approach it not just as a text but also as a visual. Indeed, looking at the visual elements of the materials produced by disinformation architects in the Philippines reveals one of the strategies that underpin their campaigns. Here we refer to the need to translate the technical language of campaign objectives into social media posts that are imbued with authenticity. To do this, the disinformation architects include visuals that weaponize popular vernaculars, or the aesthetic and semiotic resources that predominate and circulate in Filipino popular culture. This kind of digital disinformation production builds on the existing logics and process of political marketing that is premised on the recognition that ordinary citizens have the agency and ability to interpret or even reject persuasive marketing messages handed down from above by political elites (Scammell 2014). As such, it aims to establish a reciprocal relationship between brands and publics that takes seriously their interests, needs, and emotional responses. A crucial part of this relationship is establishing a strong connection with people’s “emotional literacies” (Corner and Pels 2003) or “affective intelligences” (Van Zoonen 2005). These are specific rationalities that guide their engagement with the political sphere that stem from personal experiences and cultural narratives they know and, crucially, feel.

A concrete example of how disinformation producers tried to imbue visuals with an aesthetic of authenticity can be seen in memes deployed for digital black ops, a technique used to attack the character of opposing politicians. Take for instance this misogynistic meme that sought to undermine the credibility of Mocha Uson, who is currently an assistant secretary in the Presidential Communications Operations Office. Uson is a favorite target of anti-Duterte campaigns because she has been one of the most visible and most vocal pro-Duterte key opinion leaders online. This particular meme amplified other similar digital disinformation materials that aimed to continually dredge up Uson’s past career as a controversy-seeking sexy star. It shamed her by harping on about conservative Filipino tropes about womanhood by showing provocative images of her and insinuating that she is not “*disente*” (decent) and so should not be believed.

Key to establishing authenticity in this “Mocha meme” was its deliberately amateurish aesthetics. To deflect the fact that this meme comes out of a professionalized disinformation production architecture, it consisted of photographs that were awkwardly cropped, had text fonts with an odd color scheme, and an overall layout that decidedly did not adhere to the rule of thirds. Also important for the meme’s authenticity was the use of images that sought to resonate with the broad public, as they were drawn from popular tropes in Philippine entertainment media. The photograph to its left was of the television and young film superstar Kathryn Bernardo, who is posited to embody the qualities of the supporters of Duterte’s rival presidential candidate Mar Roxas. What this image referenced in particular was how Bernardo was a wildly popular young celebrity who was acutely aware of how she should act in public because, as she put it, “we have to do our best to become good role models for the youth” (Iglesias 2018). In stark contrast was Mocha Uson’s photograph to the meme’s right, whose indecency is said to capture key qualities of Duterte’s supporters. This image connected especially well with the accusations that in bringing her controversial sexy star persona to her new government job, Uson was trading in so-called political porn—“the immersion in obscenity, the choreographed assault on the real in favor of the fantasy, [and] the repeated appeal to the prurient” (Nery 2018)—and consequently irresponsibly debasing the quality of public discussion.

Approaching disinformation materials as a visual is clearly helpful in unpacking how disinformation architects can weaponize aesthetic and semiotic resources. The case of the “Mocha meme,” for instance, crystallized the deployment of authenticity through the popular vernaculars of amateur design and Philippine entertainment media tropes. At the same time, however, the analysis above also points to another dynamic at play. That is, disinformation materials cannot be understood in isolation. The “Mocha meme” was certainly embedded within broader narratives of social drama, such as the value of amateur voices over professional voices in the digital public sphere or of decency over indecency for women in the public eye.

Disinformation and narrative

Building on from the point above, we now want to evidence the value of approaching fake news not just as clear-cut “truth” and “lies,” as assertions of facts embedded within social narratives. For this we will mention one of the most notorious digital disinformation campaigns in the aftermath of President Duterte’s victory. Known as the “Ilibing Na” (which roughly translates as

“Allow the Burial”) campaign, this was the highly organized push for historical revisionism to sanitize the brutal dictatorship of former President Ferdinand Marcos and, consequently, pave the way for his burial in the “Libingan ng mga Bayani” (Cemetery for Heroes).

In the interim between Duterte’s order and the Supreme Court decision and the eventual burial of Marcos, we followed the Facebook and Twitter discussions around the “Ilibing Na” campaign. We observed how the disinformation architects ensured that social media served as an integral platform within a wider political campaign, as it echoed and amplified the revisionist narrative of Marcos as the Philippines’ greatest president and the martial law years as the country’s golden years. This went completely against established historical and literary scholarship that described the dictatorial regime as characterized by, among other horrors, widespread human rights violations and unmitigated government corruption (see De Vera 2016). Moreover, and here we borrow from Hochschild (2016), this narrative aligned very well with the “deep story” held by Duterte and his supporters regarding the viability of an authoritarian regime, as it would get the country to move forward faster. As Duterte himself said, Marcos deserved to be buried “because he was a great president and he was a hero” and, moreover, that the burial would catalyze “national healing.” The children of Marcos also echoed this claim, saying that what the country really needed was to “forgive and move on.”

During our research, we saw how online petitions, memes, videos, and articles from websites with unverified content were weaponized to challenge existing narratives about Marcos and bring different frameworks to the burial issue. Crucially, these were also used to attack and silence critics of the burial. One such example was a Facebook post about Vice President Leni Robredo’s opposition to the burial. If Uson was a favorite target of the anti-Duterte camp, so Robredo was always in the firing line of the pro-Duterte camp. This was primarily because she was the highest government official affiliated with the Liberal Party, which not only touted itself as the opposition party to the Duterte government but was also a key opposition force during the Marcos regime.

The Facebook post shared a news video clip of Robredo’s interview with the accompanying caption: “So why does Leni the queen of cheap campaigns disapprove of the burial of Marcos in the Heroes’ Cemetery ... Watch and learn how crazy and out of her mind Leni is.” The post elicited over 16,000 reactions (likes, hearts, angry reactions), 28,624 shares, and over 7,200 comments,

with the video viewed over 1 million times. The deep story carried by the post seemed to have resonated very well with the supporters of Duterte, as many of the comments on the post expressed their support for the revisionist narrative about Marcos, specifically by throwing a disturbing array of expletives at Robredo. They called her a “bitch,” “stupid,” “insane,” told her to “shut up,” and went as far as wishing she would die along with her three daughters. They also expressed resentment towards the Liberal Party, which they characterized as the evil enemy of the Duterte presidency.

We subsequently asked the disinformation architects about the toxic and vitriolic commentaries generated by digital disinformation materials like the Facebook post against Robredo. Their response to this was to wash their hands and explain away their responsibility. Unfortunately, the distinct architecture of networked disinformation in the Philippines made it easy for them to do this. It is to this that we next shift our attention.

Disinformation as cultural production

The third innovation we proposed above was to conceptualize fake news not just as mere content but as an instantiation of organizational processes and labor relations. Our study on digital disinformation in the Philippines, for instance, took a production studies approach that examined disinformation as a culture of production, which meant listening to the intentions and experiences of fake news producers in their own words and attending to their "creativity within constraints" (Mayer, Caldwell & Banks 2009: 2) in light of opaque institutional procedures. This enabled us to develop an account of the disinformation production process that was inherently social, underscoring how the different architects of disinformation drew from institutional knowledge, professional skills, and interpersonal relationships when innovating techniques of political deception.

Our production studies approach allowed us to see the different ways in which disinformation architects engaged in moral justifications. They employed various denial strategies that allowed them to claim that their work was not actually “trolling” or “fake news” and that, crucially, enabled them to displace moral responsibility for the consequences of digital disinformation on the heightened toxicity and vitriol of contemporary online political discussions.

We observed that workers drew from slightly different cultural scripts when justifying their work based on where they are positioned in the professional hierarchy. Take the chief disinformation architects, for instance. They saw themselves as taking on the more “professional” work of crafting campaign objectives and messages, especially when compared to the anonymous digital influencers who had to do the “dirty” work of translating their objectives and messages into actual social media content. This allowed them to create some psychological distance from the actual production of digital disinformation materials. Together with this, they did not see digital disinformation as something new, arguing instead that they had used the same advertising and public relations techniques in orchestrating the launch of Facebook business pages, making hashtag campaigns trend worldwide, and building engaged communities for household brands, telecommunications companies, or celebrities. As one of them put it, “Whether you're a movie, soft drink, restaurant, or politician, it's all the same to me. Just give me the brief, I know what to do.”

For the anonymous digital influencers, meanwhile, the casual and short-term nature of disinformation projects meant that they could downplay their involvement in it. Because the work was just one project or “sideline” they juggle among others, they could tell themselves that “fake news” does not define their whole identity. One of them explained, “Being a character or a ‘pseudo’ is only very fleeting because you are not the person. You just assume that personality. You trend for a while and then move on.” The other thing is that the digital influencers were adamant in saying that the production of actual fake news and other disinformation content was not their handiwork, but that of unnamed others in the disinformation architecture or of “real supporters” from the grassroots. They said that it is these others who were overly zealous, as they themselves were professional enough not to engage in misogyny, racism, and hate. This justification allowed them to displace perpetually any accountability for the grimmer aspects of disinformation production.

Disinformation from the south

Finally, we suggest that our understanding of fake news should go beyond “Western-centric” lenses and take a global and comparative approach to disinformation production. Our study on digital disinformation production in the Philippines was certainly inspired by the challenge posed by Paula Chakravarty and Srirupa Roy (2017) to trace the historical antecedents of mediatized

populism in particular. We took seriously the importance of thinking through how new social media affordances for political exchange—such as the currently toxic and vitriolic online public spheres in many established democracies—map onto entrenched political systems, class hierarchies, and social dynamics in developing countries like the Philippines, which has deep histories of populist sentiment.

Paying attention to the historical context of the Philippines allowed us to understand, for instance, the genesis of the country's advertising and public relations-led architecture of networked disinformation. This had to do with how national politics in the Philippines has always been characterized by weak political party ideologies and affiliations that are completely overwhelmed by strong personalistic relationships with presidential contenders who are perceived to possess the right image branding (Bionat 1998; Coronel et al. 2004). And the roots of this ran deep, what with Philippine politics having been shaped by a culture of patronage between an oligarchic elite and supporters who establish relationships of dependency and obligation with them. Growing out of a system of patron–client relations established during the Spanish colonial period (1521–1898), the country's powerful political families and personalities have continued to cultivate clientelistic relationships with their loyal followers (Hedman and Sidel 2000).

Looking at the particular digital labor conditions in the Philippines also enabled us to see how the architecture of network disinformation was heavily entrenched in systematized labor and incentive structures that have been normalized in, and even professionalized by, the creative and digital industries. One thing we saw was that the chief disinformation architects sought to exploit the porous boundaries between advertising and public relations and the digital underground. They used their expertise and leadership in the former to gain power and prestige in the latter, thereby establishing themselves as pioneers of a new industry. The other thing we observed was that many of the anonymous digital influencers got dragged into the digital underground because of the precarious work conditions in mainstream media. After compounded experiences of rejection and exploitation at the hands of the media industry, they found themselves seeking financial stability in digital disinformation work.

Using this case study of disinformation in the Philippines as a test upon which to ground grand narratives usually developed and deployed in the West enabled us to see that there is no one-size-

fits-all solution to the complex problem of digital disinformation. Global initiatives to address the problem, such as the emerging critical scholarship on the operations of power by global corporations such as Facebook and Google, are of course important (see Sabeel Rahman 2017). At the same time, however, understanding local contexts of disinformation production and the ways that architects of disinformation evade responsibility and entice other workers to join them in the digital underground allows us to craft better bespoke interventions that are suited to specific country contexts. For the Philippines, our suggestions included the following. (1) Addressing the development of a self-regulatory commission that requires disclosure of political consultancies is a step towards encouraging the traceability and accountability of these digital campaigns within the advertisement and PR industry. (2) Create industry sanctions and safety nets that prevent precarious creative workers from slipping into the digital underground.

Conclusion and discussion: Fake news and scandal

We argued in the opening section of this chapter that de-Westernizing and broadening our understanding of fake news to include issues of narrative, cultural production, and aesthetics can help us better link the fake news phenomenon to larger issues of media sociology, including the role of scandal in the public sphere. In this concluding discussion we mount a brief intervention in order to demonstrate the productivity of this approach. We want to tie the previous case study to larger issues of public space, visibility, and scandal, and in doing so begin a rapprochement between questions of fake news and larger theoretical questions.

Media sociologist John Thompson has offered the most robust and theoretically sophisticated analysis of the relationship between the twenty-first-century media system and political scandal (Thompson 2004), focusing on the relationship between scandal and the media's power to make select individuals visible to the public at large (Thompson 2005). There are two strands to Thompson's argument, each tying into a different set of assumptions about the nature of communication and the political world. The first strand is grounded in a critique of Michel Foucault and his concept of "panopticonism," or the notion that society has created an internalized sense of continuous surveillance at the heart of modern subjectivity. With his concept of the panopticon, Thompson argues, Foucault neglects to consider the role of the media and particularly its ability to engineer certain forms of public visibility that are limited to a (relatively) few individuals. Rather than living in a state of continuous visibility, Thompson contends (contra

Foucault) the media draws its very power from its ability to make certain people visible at certain times (Thompson 2005, 40–42).

One of the forms of media visibility arises via **scandal**, which is itself related to certain changes in the constitution of politics. Thompson (2013) relates the prevalence of scandal in recent times to the decline of traditional political parties with their stable and class-based patterns of allegiance. The new political models that tend to dominate campaigns use the personal ethics and conduct of individual politicians as a means by which to lure increasingly non-committed voters to their side. One way to do this is via **scandal**, which simultaneously taints the moral character of politicians and virtually guarantees that this moral character will become the subject of heightened media visibility. Political scandal thus stems from larger changes in both the political and media sphere, with the media possessing increased power to make individuals visible and with politics as a game through which to lure the large number of uncommitted voters to a political side.

Thompson's analysis, one of the few large-scale sociological theories to take the media seriously, is a compelling one that does much to explain the dynamics of modern mediated politics. We also think that it both illuminates and obscures the role played by "fake news" in the development of media scandals in the digital age.

In terms of illumination, we can see from our case study that, even in our hyper-partisan age, moral judgments about candidates for office and politicians in the public sphere still matter. One of the major strategies of disinformation teams in the Philippines, as we have seen, is to impugn the morality of government officials, particularly women. It is an open question as to whether this is a localized phenomenon or a general one, but either way this analysis of the Philippines demonstrates that fake news can thrive in an environment where moral judgments play a major role in political life. Fake news and disinformation can publicly unearth the (usually false) inner lives of candidates, constructing a (false) media narrative that turns government officials into moral reprobates.

On the other hand, some part of the conceptual cloudiness of Thompson's theory in relationship to the fake news phenomenon stems, not from a flaw in the theory, but rather from a media landscape which is dramatically different than it was even a decade ago. For one thing, we think that the Foucauldian notion of the panopticon is **more** valid now than it was when Foucault

proposed it, and certainly more valid than it was when Thompson constructed his theory of media power. The endlessly proliferating world of digital and social media has created a system in which many of the most energized citizens are quite literally “bathing” in the media flow at all times; media is not simply a medium, as Mark Deuze argues, but might be better seen as a *media life* (Deuze 2012). We can see this from our Philippines case study insofar as disinformation strategies assume an always surveilled, quantified public. Metrics, surveillance, and tracking (Anderson 2013) play a major role in fake news strategies and the flourishing of scandalous fake news.

Regardless of the specifics at play in this particular case, we think the fake news concept is in need of an overhaul. In this chapter we have outlined the aspects of the phenomenon we think should be more emphasized in scholarship going forward. We have tried to demonstrate the utility of these revisions in our case study of the role played by disinformation workers in the Philippines. Finally, we have shown how broadening our understanding of fake news takes us out of a linear, media-effects model of communication. Instead, it allows us to discuss disinformation in relationship to more supple sociological theories, including scandal, the public sphere, and personal visibility in media space. Such conceptual creativity is necessary if we are to continue to integrate the dramatic changes of twenty-first-century mediated life with older, and still robust, frameworks for understanding the media’s relationship with society.

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