



The Truth Matters: A Citizen's Guide to Separating Facts from Lies and Stopping Fake News in its Tracks

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Abstract

This is a book review of *The Truth Matters: A Citizen's Guide to Separating Facts from Lies and Stopping Fake News in Its Tracks* by Bruce Bartlett.

Keywords: Fake news; Journalism; Media outlets; Best practices

Book Review

The Truth Matters: A Citizen's Guide to Separating Facts from Lies and Stopping Fake News in Its Tracks by Bruce Bartlett is an extremely timely and useful book that seeks to provide tips for people who are trying to make sense of the news in a world rife with misinformation and disinformation. Bartlett explores most of the major sources of news in today's world and provides a guide to how to evaluate what to trust and what to question. His guidance is not about particular media brands but about how various forms of media can be used and misused to convey information.

Bartlett covers many important issues related to media in the book. He explains why traditional media, such as newspapers, cannot meet all of our information needs and are losing the competition for market share to radio and television because these media have the ability to report events in a more timely fashion, sometimes even live. He says many analysts believe that almost all print newspapers will disappear in the next few years because of this disadvantage.

He emphasizes that fake news is not a new concept and only its production and distribution techniques have been updated. The Internet and social media have provided a convenient and easy platform for spreading lies among people, although these technologies can also be used to promote the truth. Bartlett argues that the repetition of a lie may validate it; true believers will only believe what they want to believe.

Bartlett believes that "gatekeepers" who process and filter information for dissemination, whether for publication, broadcasting, the Internet, or some other mode of communication, play an important and decisive role in assessing the accuracy of news. But in the Internet age, because of the possibility of producing and distributing news all day long, gatekeepers have lost their traditional roles. Also, the approaching end of the print newspaper era has reduced the number of reputable journalists.

According to Bartlett, some politicians are spreading fake news and presenting it as truth without regard to the effects of that disinformation on society. Bartlett believes the main problem here is that many people prefer fake news, and on the other hand, fake news has many financial advantages that can include several dollars per click. But Bartlett also offers some solutions. If there is doubt about the accuracy of the news, search other websites to find out how to handle a news item and how journalists comply with professional standards for news and media production. This is likely a course of action not many will take.

Bartlett defines critical thinking as the key to countering fake news and considers the role of education to be crucial in this regard. But is there an incentive for politicians to push for critical thinking in the education process?

Some of the chapter subjects are very important and complex and it is difficult to tackle them in just five to ten pages. For example, Chapter Twelve, "The Fake News," and Chapter Fifteen, "How to Deal with Fake News," are covered in only seven pages. It seems that it was better for the author to skip some of the topics and focus only some subjects and go into more detail about them than is offered in the book.

Another weakness of this book is the exaggerated verbiage that the author uses to express some subject matter. For example, Bartlett states at the beginning of the first chapter of the book: "One who never looks at a newspaper is better than one who reads it. Because someone who doesn't know anything is closer to the truth than someone whose mind is filled with error" [1]. This sentence seems to say that most of

the content written in newspapers is inaccurate. This is an exaggerated claim that is far from true. Another example is in Chapter Two: "Alleged knowledge of politicians is more than the knowledge they have. I, as someone who has worked for the Treasury and the White House for many years, did not often do interviews based on my personal knowledge and experience, but rather on what I read in the articles that day" [2]. In the statement above, Bartlett makes a claim about what he did and then seems to extrapolate that other journalists do the same thing. What is the basis for this assertion? Is there evidence that other journalists do this too? There is no evidence offered to either refute or support this claim.

The author also talks about the end of the age of print newspapers in Chapter Twelve as if it is a foregone conclusion. This is an assertion that certainly has not happened yet. There are still credible print newspapers being circulated and distributed daily around the world. Although new technologies have had a significant impact on newspapers and their circulation, we will probably never be able to speak about the end of the era of print newspapers.

In the final chapter of his book, on the subject of fake news, Bartlett makes judgments about people without any referenced research or survey data. For example, he says problem is that people want fake news, or, people tend to believe fake news [3]. It is clear that the use of the word "people" in general and without any statistical evidence in a book that is about truth is inappropriate and surprising.

In general, although Bartlett has talked about the importance of references and citations in several chapters, he seems to have not paid adequate attention to the use of references in the writing of his book. Although he has addressed several important topics throughout the book and he has made a number of claims, there are no in-text

references found in the book, and there is no use of footnotes, except with a few, minor exceptions. Only at the end of the book does Bartlett provide a list of suggested sources for readers.

Finally, it can be said that many of the headlines and headings of this book are closely linked to the science of political communication and its implications. Topics such as resource validity, resource grading, and the categorization of sources and parameters of trust in them as ways of dealing with fake news are important topics in the study of political communication. Perhaps, some of the weaknesses of this book are due to the over-reliance on Bartlett's own experiences. Bartlett merely refers to his personal and work experiences in various parts of his book, instead of referring to previous studies and scientific findings of research in political communication. In some cases, it has led to false generalizations and conclusions, as has been mentioned. But overall, the author was able to aptly address some of the new and unanticipated challenges in the production, dissemination, and consumption of news, and he provides some useful new ways to deal with them.

References

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