## League

### AC – Free Press

#### I affirm the resolution—Resolved: Resolved: In a democracy, a free press ought to prioritize objectivity over advocacy.

#### Subjectivity has eclipsed factual news reporting. The line between journalism and misinformation is increasingly nonexistent

**Kavanagh 19** — [Kavanagh, Jennifer, “News in a Digital Age: Comparing the Presentation of Information over Time and Across Platforms,” No Publication, xx-xx-xxxx, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\_reports/RR2960.html, accessed 2-24-2022]

This report presents a quantitative assessment of how the presentation of news has changed over the past 30 years and how it varies across platforms. Using RAND-Lex, a suite of tools that combine machine learning and text analysis, the researchers considered such linguistic characteristics as social attitude, sentiment, affect, subjectivity, and relation with authority for four comparisons: newspapers before and after 2000 (through 2017), broadcast television news before and after 2000 (through 2000), broadcast news and prime-time cable programming for the period from 2000 to 2017, and newspapers and online journalism during the 2012–2017 period. Over time, and as society moved from "old" to "new" media, news content has generally shifted from more-objective event- and context-based reporting to reporting that is more subjective, relies more heavily on argumentation and advocacy, and includes more emotional appeals. These changes were observed across platforms, appearing least significant in the evolution of print journalism and most stark in comparisons of broadcast news with prime-time cable programming and of print journalism with online journalism. The report quantifies the sizes of observed changes and provides examples of what these changes look like in context. It also includes a discussion of the implications of these trends for the changing media ecosystem and for Truth Decay—the term RAND uses to refer to the diminishing role of facts and analysis in political discourse.

Key Findings

Print journalism has made modest shifts toward more-subjective reporting

Typical characteristics of print reporting in the pre-2000 period were context- and event-based reporting, reliance on directives, and use of titles and official positions. Many of these linguistic features were frequently used together.

The post-2000 sample showed a meaningful shift away from such language and toward unpacking social and policy issues through character-centered stories, such as homeless children as a way to discuss homelessness.

Television news has made stronger shifts to subjectivity, conversation, and argument

Similar to print journalism, television news has shifted from straight reporting that dealt with complex issues and grounded news in the abstract concepts and values of shared public matters to a more subjective, conversational, argumentative style of news presentation.

When comparing broadcast news with prime-time cable programming in the period after 2000, an even more dramatic difference is apparent, with prime-time cable programming being more subjective, abstract, and directive. However, prime-time programs on cable news channels tend to be opinion-based shows led by pundits, not news reporting-based programs, which could influence the comparison.

Online journalism features a subjective kind of advocacy

Online journalism is more personal and direct than print journalism, narrating key social and policy issues through very personal frames and subjective references.

This research presents key insights for Truth Decay

There does seem to be evidence of a growing use of opinion and subjectivity in the presentation of news. However, the results of this study are not necessarily generalizable. Also, some of the effect sizes are relatively small, and changes observed over time and differences across platforms are subtle in many cases.

Changes in news presentation identified in this report are relevant to individual news consumer decisions about which media organizations to use and which to trust; trends toward subjective journalism might reduce that trust.

#### Contention 1 is the Propagandic Use of the Media

#### Propaganda was wielded by Nazi Germany to gain support for the structured extermination of Jews to great effect.

Nico Voigtländer and Hans-Joachim Voth, Voigtländer works at the Centre for Economic Policy Research in London, Voth is a Foundation Professor of Economics at the University of Zurich. They write…

Attempts at modifying public opinions, attitudes, and beliefs range from advertising and schooling to “brainwashing.” Their effectiveness is highly controversial. In this paper, we use survey data on anti-Semitic beliefs and attitudes in a representative sample of Germans surveyed in 1996 and 2006 to show that Nazi indoctrination––with its singular focus on fostering racial hatred––was highly effective. Between 1933 and 1945, young Germans were exposed to anti-Semitic ideology in schools, in the (extracurricular) Hitler Youth, and through radio, print, and film. **As a result, Germans who grew up under the Nazi regime are much more anti-Semitic than those born before or after that period: the share of committed anti-Semites, who answer a host of questions about attitudes toward Jews in an extreme fashion, is 2–3 times higher than in the population as a whole**. Results also hold for average beliefs, and not just the share of extremists; average views of Jews are much more negative among those born in the 1920s and 1930s. Nazi indoctrination was most effective where it could tap into preexisting prejudices; those born in districts that supported anti-Semitic parties before 1914 show the greatest increases in anti-Jewish attitudes. These findings demonstrate the extent to which beliefs can be modified through policy intervention. We also identify parameters amplifying the effectiveness of such measures, such as preexisting prejudices.

#### Not only has propaganda been incredibly harmful in history, but it is an increasingly severe issue in modern times – given the rise of digitalization and the ease of the spread of false ideas.

Albinko Hasic, a Bosnian-American attorney, digital analyst and history PhD, writes that…

While memes originally had a comedic purpose, they invaded the political realm in a far more sinister manner during the 2016 presidential campaign. **Like the propaganda posters from the world wars, politically pointed memes employed a striking visual coupled with effective communication intended to alter the mind frame or subconscious of a viewer**. In many cases, they also aimed to dehumanize the opposition and to personalize the political cause in question.

The alt-right in particular weaponized the meme format to spread disinformation through social media. Members of the alt-right turned characters such as Pepe the Frog into symbols for their virulently racist movement, building awareness of and even support for their cause. The meme propaganda came from foreign sources, too, as reports of Russian bots [spreading disunity](https://archive.fo/o/WYvYa/https:/www.wired.com/story/russia-ira-propaganda-senate-report/) surfaced.

Most worryingly, the new political art format has far greater viral potential than the posters of yesteryear. **Instead of just government-commissioned posters, any figure, domestic or international, with a political agenda can reach a mass audience with weaponized symbols, images and digital art to advance a political cause**.

Ultimately, propaganda posters can teach us a great deal about the psychological effects of politically pointed art. While memes may seem like the silly clutter of Internet culture, studies of advertising and the way we consume information have shown that such images can [alter our subconscious](https://archive.fo/o/WYvYa/theconversation.com/the-hypodermic-effect-how-propaganda-manipulates-our-emotions-94966), often in ways we do not understand. Or as one Garfield meme put it, “You are not immune to propaganda.” **And the longevity of propaganda is readily apparent — Flagg’s own creation of Uncle Sam pointing a finger at us has long outlasted its original intent. In many ways, it has become a staple of Americana.**

The danger with memes is that the visuals are no longer centrally orchestrated pieces, designed to advance the public good. **They spread in real time, seemingly from the depths of the Internet, and virtually anybody can achieve virality through the power of mass replication. Discerning facts from fiction has become the real challenge with this latest incarnation of visual propaganda**. Time will tell if memes will become a permanent part of our political history, but for now, we are still experiencing their unpredictable effects.

#### Contention 2 is Populism

#### Specifically, the rise of populism has been directly correlated with an increase in propaganda and opinionated disinformation released by media outlets.

Michael Hameleers, Assistant Professor in Political Communication at the Amsterdam School of Communication Research, writes that…

The discursive construction of a populist divide between the ‘good’ people and ‘corrupt’ elites can conceptually be linked to disinformation. More specifically, (right-wing) populists are not only attributing blame to the political elites, but increasingly vent anti-media sentiments in which the mainstream press is scapegoated for not representing the people. In an era of post-truth relativism, ‘fake news’ is increasingly politicized and used as a label to delegitimize political opponents or the press. To better understand the affinity between disinformation and populism, this article conceptualizes two relationships between these concepts: (1) blame attributions to the dishonest media as part of the corrupt elites that mislead the people; and (2) the expression of populist boundaries in a people-centric, anti-expert, and evidence-free way. The results of a comparative qualitative content analysis in the US and Netherlands indicate that the political leaders Donald Trump and Geert Wilders blame legacy media in populist ways by regarding them as part of the corrupt and lying establishment. Compared to left-wing populist and mainstream politicians, these politicians are the most central players in the discursive construction of populist disinformation. Both politicians bypassed empirical evidence and expert knowledge whilst prioritizing the people’s truth and common sense at the center stage of honesty and reality. These expressions resonated with public opinion on Facebook, although citizens were more likely to frame mis- and disinformation in terms of ideological cleavages. These findings have important implications for our understanding of the role of populist discourse in a post-factual era.

#### Thus, I urge you to vote affirmative.