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Truth is What Happens to News

On journalism, fake news, and post-truth

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Abstract

Here I propose that the phenomenon of “fake news” is indicative of the contested position of news and the dynamics of belief formation in contemporary societies. It is symptomatic of the collapse of the old news order and the chaos of contemporary public communication. These developments attest to a new chapter in the old struggle over the definition of truth—governments waging propaganda wars, elites, and corporations vie to dominate news coverage, and mainstream journalism’s continuous efforts to claim to provide authoritative reportage of current events. The communication chaos makes it necessary to revisit normative arguments about journalism and democracy as well as their feasibility in radically new conditions. Conventional notions of news and truth that ground standard journalistic practice are harder to achieve and maintain amid the destabilization of the past hierarchical order.

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