

Book Review

Journell, W. (Ed.). (2019). *Unpacking fake news: An educator's guide to navigating the media with students*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press

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Abstract:

In *Unpacking Fake News: An Educator's Guide to Navigating the Media with Students* (2019), editor Wayne Journell and the contributing scholars offer an overview of the issue of fake news and how teachers can teach students to navigate it critically. The book starts by showing how fake news works and impacts people's beliefs, especially in the political field. This book also gives the reader an overview of historical events of fake news and why teenagers are more susceptible to it. Additionally, the book provides readers with assessment tools that can help students evaluate and distinguish between fake and real news and includes educational approaches and strategies that teachers can use to help their students become critical thinkers.

Nowadays, social media is considered a source of information for many people of different ages; however, the information may be real or fabricated (Journell, 2019). The main idea of this book is to provide students with strategies to combat unreliable sources and fake news. Fake news is rapidly deployable, so to combat this, civic education scholars provide social studies teachers with valuable information for teaching students the impact of and how to identify fake news.

Chapter one describes how fake news works, especially in social media. H. James Garrett discusses the fake news taxonomy in great detail: The first type of fake news highlights specific issues for entertainment purposes or critique of culture, the second type of fake news targets disinformation and shapes people's beliefs in the political field, and the third type of fake news

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dismisses reliable news and describes it as a misinformation. The chapter also describes the three emotional effects of newly encountered information: (i) “motivated reasoning,” in which people tend to interpret information based on their view of the world, (ii) “confirmation bias,” which states that individuals are inclined to interpret evidence relying on their existing knowledge of the world, and (iii) the “backfire effect” (pp. 20-21), which means that people tend to reject evidence that goes against their beliefs, which in turn strengthens their beliefs.

Chapter two by Woodson, King, and Kim discusses the impact of fake news on African American life, providing some stories to demonstrate how fake news affects African American people. For instance, one historical incidence of the damaging effect of fake news involved the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863: The authors demonstrate how fake news led to the delay of the dissemination of the proclamation for two years in Texas in order to sustain slavery. The second moment regards the Black Lives Matter Global Network (BLMGN), which seeks better treatment for Black communities: Individuals belonging to this group were accused of being terrorists and criminals by Russia during the U.S. presidential election of 2016.

Chapter three outlines why adolescents who interact a great deal with social media are more vulnerable to fake news. Ellen Middaugh provides results from several national surveys showing why teenagers specifically are more susceptible to fake news than other groups. This chapter focuses on the habits of teenagers, citing national surveys that show how much time teenagers spend on social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat). There are many factors that motivate teenagers to interact with social media, including identity exploration, one of the features of adolescence. The author concludes with practical solutions such as engaging students to analyze and discover different sources in social media and building credibility skills by reading and discussing information that could help teenagers to combat the potential effects of constant exposure to fake news.

In chapter four, Sarah McGrew, Joel Breakstone, Teresa Ortega, Mark Smith, and Sam Wineburg highlight the importance of integrating logical reasoning skills in class discussions about political issues. The authors present a new assessment of students’ civic reasoning to determine the extent to which teenagers can separate fake news from real news. In the assessment, students analyzed a post about Trump on Facebook, a link followed by a link for the source of the tweet, and a video on YouTube; the results of the assessment showed that students usually focus on the content and do not click on the source to verify the information. The authors demonstrate how middle school to college-age students can verify information in social media and how it is important to improve their thinking skills to evaluate online information.

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In chapter five, Avner Segall, Margaret Smith Crocco, Anne-Lise Halvorsen, and Rebecca Jacobsen present a longitudinal mixed-method study with high school students focusing on students' perspectives on U.S. immigration policy to highlight how fake news affects the tenor of their discussions. In their findings, students used incorrect and biased information to support their points of view.

In chapter six, Erica Hodgins and Joseph Kahne focus on the challenges that a person faces when assessing the credibility of information: (i) the spread of the different social media platforms, (ii) distrusting democratic institutions such as journalism, and (iii) the large number of political parties. The authors provide some educational approaches to civic media education: (i) developing metacognition concerning the reliability of online information, (ii) providing youth with skills for assessing the truth of claims, and (iii) providing youth with more opportunities to practice assessment strategies they have learned.

Chapter seven by Wayne Journell and Christopher H. Clark provides an overview of how memes as a traditional form of media can be analyzed and how students can identify the hidden messages they may convey. For example, teachers can help their students to create memes and post them on social media in order to assist them to understand and improve their critical thinking skills. This chapter focuses mainly on political memes and their effects on social issues. Additionally, historical context is provided to demonstrate how memes have developed over time and how they are used for political persuasion.

In chapter eight, Jennifer Hauver presents eight mini-lessons for elementary and middle school teachers to assist students to think deeply and be critical consumers of information. This includes students building trust in themselves and understanding the two sides of the story, the true and the fake side.

In conclusion, this book is a useful resource for K-12 social studies teachers, providing them with practices to support K-12 students in becoming more critical consumers of news disseminated through social media and to assist students in protecting themselves from fake news in social media.

References

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