

# The Fallacy of Fake News: Exploring the Commonsensical Argument Appeals of Fake News Rhetoric through a Gramscian Lens

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*Thanks to Donald Trump, fake news has become a buzzword that allows for the dismissal of facts which are inconvenient to a person's worldview. When used to characterize media sources, this rhetorical maneuver becomes an essentially irrefutable argumentative technique – a “trump” card that ends a discussion because the opposition's premise is depicted as false. Since deploying the concept of fake news reinforces ideology and systems of power, this paper explores the phenomenon from the perspective of Gramscian hegemony. More specifically, Gramsci's notion of common sense helps us understand the fallacious appeal of fake news. As a result, the paper discusses the implications of fake news in the context of hegemony and provides suggestions for potential ways to articulate good sense as a means to challenge the common sense of fake news.*

**Keywords:** Trump, political communication, argumentation, post-truth

In the movie, *Anon*,<sup>1</sup> we witness first-hand how a fabricated sense of reality threatens society. While investigating a series of murders, detective Sal Frieland (played by Clive Owens) realizes his world of automated eye-scanning reveals a glitch in the system that highly-skilled hackers (known as “fixers”) can manipulate. These fixers can hijack people's memories and visions of sight to concoct different realities. For a person trying to solve a crime, detective Frieland is extremely frustrated by these events. But what is noticeable in this film is how fixers use un-truths (i.e., manipulated data) to control the conception of the world of their identified viewer-victims. Although this fictional – and somewhat dystopian – reality portrays the imagination of writer/director Andrew Niccol, the film also suggests the power of dis/mis-information. In a sense, the movie explains the power behind what we now call “fake news.”

Before the 2016 U.S. presidential election, most Americans – and probably most viewers around the world – had never heard the words “fake news.” Despite historical events premised on

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An earlier version of this essay was presented in December 2018 at the Democracy and Disinformation in the Era of Trump conference hosted by the Clinton Institute at the University College Dublin in Dublin, Ireland. Portions of this research were funded by a research grant from the National Institute for Civil Discourse. The author wishes to thank the editorial staff at *JCR* and the anonymous reviewers for their content suggestions, and Dr. Nathan Carpenter for his assistance regarding Twitter research. The author can be reached by email at [jpzompe@ilstu.edu](mailto:jpzompe@ilstu.edu).

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Baur (Producer), & Andrew Niccol (Director). *Anon* [Motion Picture] (2018). United States: K5.

lies, falsehoods, and subterfuge, the idea of “fake news” has gained recent currency mainly because of its use as a rhetorical strategy by former candidate and now U.S. President, Donald Trump, and its contemporary and convenient use as a way to dismiss dissonant claims. Indeed, yellow and jazz journalism, political misdirection via the press, and propaganda have occurred at least as long as we have had nation-states since their codification in the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Even Aristotle<sup>2</sup> discussed nearly 2500 years ago the use of red herring fallacies to dodge and deflect an opponent’s arguments. Aristotle referred to the argument as the “In a Certain Respect and Simply” fallacy that generalizes a particular issue to a larger notion, but such an extrapolation is inaccurate.

One of my communication colleagues, Dr. Dana Cloud,<sup>3</sup> recently wrote how fake news is a rhetorical modality of the right that privileges affect – narrative, myth, spectacle, etc. While I do not disagree, her analysis largely ignores how such strategies actually influence audiences. In other words, I am concerned with *how* fake news influences and impacts particular audiences. The severity and reach of fake news’ influence is startling: “Fake news headlines fool American adults about 75% of the time, according to a large-scale new survey conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs for BuzzFeed News. The survey also found that people who cite Facebook as a major source of news are more likely to view fake news headlines as accurate than those who rely less on the platform for news.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, in this essay, I will try to lay out my argument for how fake news connects with certain demographic groups. My argument ultimately suggests that the rhetorical strategy of calling certain news sources “fake news” is a method of enhancing an overarching narrative – a nuance that Dr. Cloud omits. In this way, my essay suggests that fake news can be (and is) used as a tool to manipulate certain arguments for particular audiences. In fact, the *New York Times* refers to fake news as a “rhetorical weapon” in an effort to change people’s attitudes.<sup>5</sup>

One might wonder about how, exactly, I will attempt to understand *how* news sources impact us in ways that seem like truth or seem like “fake” news. My exploration into this is not quantitative in nature, which might concern some or even call into question my analysis for others. Instead, my approach is an interpretive one, relying heavily on rhetorical principles. We cannot actually “know” what an audience thinks when they consume fake news, nor can we know why they are seduced by it. Despite the value of quantitative measures, even they cannot ascertain answers to these questions with reasonable accuracy, since they fall victim to the way a researcher words their questions, respondents can – and often do – lie, and standard deviations of such studies always already confirm the study’s deficiencies. Nevertheless, what we can do – and what I will be doing in this paper – is interpret texts in a way that the critic reads them. Of course, this is highly subjective too. However, I am concerned with how the rhetors of texts use fake news as a rhetorical strategy, which does not rely on actual audience analysis. Yet, by interpreting texts in this way, I can make what I think is a reasonable argument for how certain audiences might find such a rhetorical strategy appealing, and even compelling.

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<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric* (J. H. Freese, Trans.). Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926).

<sup>3</sup> Dana Cloud, *Reality Bites: Rhetoric and the Circulation of Truth Claims in U.S. Political Culture* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Craig Silverman & Jeremy Singer-Vine, “Most Americans Who See Fake News Believe It, New Survey Says,” *Buzzfeed News*, December 6, 2016, December 6, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/fake-news-survey>.

<sup>5</sup> William Davies, “The Age of Post-Truth Politics,” *The New York Times*, August 24, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/24/opinion/campaign-stops/the-age-of-post-truth-politics.html>.

Ultimately, I am concerned with *how* fake news is used as a rhetorical strategy and *why* it has such an impact. To understand these two questions, I believe we need to view how so-called “fake news” can be used as an argumentative, albeit rhetorical, technique. When used to characterize media sources, this rhetorical maneuver becomes an essentially irrefutable argumentative technique – a “trump” card that ends a discussion because the opposition’s premise is depicted as false. Since deploying the concept of fake news reinforces ideology and systems of power, this paper explores the phenomenon from the perspective of Gramscian hegemony. More specifically, Gramsci’s notion of common sense helps us understand the fallacious appeal of fake news. Viewing fake news from the perspective of common sense – and its concomitant relationship *with* and *to* hegemony – enables us to interrogate its deployment as a rhetorical strategy as well as its persuasive functioning.

### Understanding Fake News

So-called “fake news” can include a number of different things related to mediated information that concerns “news” of the day. Media reports have been considered “fake” to some degree, at least in relatively recent political history. Labeling news as “fake” just because it disagrees with a political philosophy has a more recent origin. While we have always had journalism that covers a particular political ideology, currently we are experiencing a phenomenon that takes this ideological divide to an entirely new level.<sup>6</sup> As a result, we should be concerned with how this type of characterization impacts our democratic principles. If, for example, the so-called watchdog of the government – i.e., the press – are demonized because they offer a different viewpoint than our elected officials, then our democracy can be placed in jeopardy.

Of course, variations of “fake news” have existed for a long time. Reportedly, the 1796 and 1800 presidential election campaigns between Thomas Jefferson and John Adams and then the 1804 campaigns between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr were riddled with venomous attacks against each candidate that were carried out in the newspapers at the time, resulting of course with the famous duel where Burr shot and killed Hamilton, which – due to the scandalous nature of Burr’s behavior – forced Burr into political retirement and opened the door for Thomas Jefferson to compete against Charles Pinckney that ended with a Jefferson victory.<sup>7</sup> We also know that in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, media moguls Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst engaged in heavy rivalry with each other to sell newspapers. As a result, they “published stories that were not entirely truthful. Exaggerated stories that used graphic details to attract readers became known as yellow journalism.”<sup>8</sup> In 1898, the United States was threatened by Spain. Many reports suggest that the “fake” reports from Hearst’s newspapers contributed to the actual war between the two nations.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, Spain was reported to have sunk the USS Maine in Havana Harbor that provided

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<sup>6</sup> Steve Coll, “Donald Trump’s “Fake News” Tactics,” *The New Yorker*, December 11, 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/11/donald-trumps-fake-news-tactics>; Angie Drobnic Holan, “The Media’s Definition of Fake News vs. Donald Trump’s,” *Politifact*, October 18, 2017, <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2017/oct/18/deciding-whats-fake-medias-definition-fake-news-vs/>.

<sup>7</sup> John Connor, “Adams and Jefferson: Personal Politics in the Early Republic,” *The Oakland Journal*, Fall 2001, [https://www2.oakland.edu/oujournal/files/21\\_adams\\_and\\_jefferson.pdf](https://www2.oakland.edu/oujournal/files/21_adams_and_jefferson.pdf); Jeffrey M. Estano, “Friendship and Conflict: The Relationship of the U.S. ‘Founding Fathers.’” *Inquiries Journal/Student Pulse* 1 (2009). <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=24>; Mike Perlis, “Fake News: It’s Just So Un-Civil,” *Forbes*, March 9, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mikeperlis/2017/03/09/fake-news-its-just-so-un-civil/#6354b654792e>.

<sup>8</sup> Carol Anderson, “Did the Newspapers Start the War?,” *Cobblestone* 20 (1999).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

the impetus for the U.S. to respond to Spain. However, Americans later learned that the USS Maine's demise was inaccurately reported by yellow journalists who had a vested interest in selling more papers if the country was at war.<sup>10</sup>

Later in the twentieth century, we now know that fake news occurred concerning the origins of the Vietnam conflict. The U.S. had been supporting the South Vietnamese with training and logistics, but had not officially entered the conflict against the North. In 1964, in the Gulf of Tonkin, the USS Maddox was destroyed by the North Vietnamese that provided the justification for the U.S. to engage militarily. However, we now know, according to Lt. Commander Paterson<sup>11</sup> of the U.S. Naval Institute, that the U.S. government purposefully orchestrated maneuvers with the South Vietnamese to provoke the North, which they did by launching a torpedo at the Maddox. Of course, the American news media reported what the government wanted people to know, which purposefully omitted all of the backstory and only concentrated on the North's attack of the vessel. Similarly, during the 1967 Six Day War, an American research ship, the USS Liberty, was bombed near the Sinai Peninsula. Reports suggested that anti-Israeli Arabs were responsible. Although the U.S. had generally been supportive of Israel, the attack on an American naval vessel solidified the alliance. Of course, American and Jewish media characterized the incident as a major event. The world learned later, however, that it was actually Israel that bombed the ship in an effort to concretize American support.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, probably the closest historical analogue to "fake news" was the Nazi concept of *lügenpresse* – or the "lying press" – which really just simply meant, "enemy propaganda."<sup>13</sup> Whenever Allied media reports characterized Germany in a negative light, the Nazis called it *lügenpresse* because such reports obviously were contrary to German propaganda. Thus, just like Trump calls opposing or negative press about him "fake news," so too did the Germans during World War II.

While fake news may not be new, we can certainly see how it has become more frequent and perhaps more damaging to American democracy. There are essentially two psychological reasons why we gravitate toward news sources that may be inaccurate. The first is known as "motivated reasoning," which is when we are motivated to find like-minded information sources that justify our beliefs. Our penchant for wanting to know or believe certain things opens us up to media influence. As McIntyre<sup>14</sup> argues, "If we are already motivated to want to believe certain things, it doesn't take much to tip us over to believing them, especially if others we care about already do so. Our inherent cognitive biases make us ripe for manipulation and exploitation by those who have an agenda to push, especially if they can discredit all other sources of information." The second is known as "confirmation bias," which happens when we expose ourselves to information that already aligns with our political ideology.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Cavendish, "The Sinking of the Maine," *History Today* 48 (1998), <https://www.historytoday.com/richard-cavendish/sinking-maine>.

<sup>11</sup> Pat Paterson, Pat, "The Truth about Tonkin," *Naval History Magazine* 22 (2008), <https://www.usni.org/magazines/navalhistory/2008-02/truth-about-tonkin>.

<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey St. Clair, "Israel's Attack on the USS Liberty: A Half Century Later, Still No Justice," *Counterpunch*, June 8, 2018, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2018/06/08/israels-attack-on-the-uss-liberty-a-half-century-later-still-no-justice/>.

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Griffing, "A Brief History of 'Lügenpresse,' the Nazi-era Predecessor to Trump's 'Fake News,'" *Haaretz*, October 8, 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/the-ominous-nazi-era-precedent-to-trump-s-fake-news-attacks-1.5438960>.

<sup>14</sup> Lee McIntyre, *Post-Truth* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018): 62.

<sup>15</sup> Danah Boyd, "Did Media Literacy Backfire?," *Points: Data & Society*, January 5, 2017, <https://points.datasociety.net/did-media-literacy-backfire-7418c084d88d>.

Social media like Twitter makes motivated reasoning and confirmation bias worse.<sup>16</sup> As Bartlett explains:

The Internet and social media have made it very easy to peddle and promote lies .... when people who have been exposed to lies are confronted with the truth, they often believe the lie even more strongly. One reason is that simple repetition of a lie even in the course of refuting it, lends it credibility. Another reason is confirmation bias – people believe what they want to believe.<sup>17</sup>

When these psychological tendencies and social media converge, we see the creation of echo chambers, or information bubbles, where people reside because they are among like-minded people and can avoid distracting or threatening alternative viewpoints.<sup>18</sup> This can be extremely troubling since, “Americans increasingly tend to see their news through prisms of red and blue — to seek confirmation of their existing beliefs, rather than information that might contradict or complicate them. We often gravitate to sources aligned with our own biases and partisan leanings.”<sup>19</sup>

Thus, most of us receive information from social media that is already tilted toward our political inclinations. According to McIntyre, “In a recent Pew poll, 62 percent of US adults reported getting their news from social media, and 71 percent of *that* was from Facebook .... The result is the well-known problem of ‘news silos’ that feed polarization and fragmentation in media content. If we get our news from social media, we can tune out those sources we don’t like, just as we can unfriend people who disagree with our political opinions.”<sup>20</sup> Simply put, “there is a growing tendency to obtain news only from sources favorable to one’s ideological or partisan point of view.”<sup>21</sup> This means, of course, that fake news can challenge our understanding of source veracity, breed mistrust of academic studies and reports, and intensify disagreements that center around faulty premises and inaccurate information. As a result, a democracy that requires actions “by” the people (and “for” the people) are jeopardized when the people no longer are able to converse about political issues.

Given the severity of fake news in our contemporary political climate, it obviously deserves study. What is perhaps more important, however, are studies that examine how fake news is used as a label to characterize opposing perspectives simply because they disagree with the position taken by a rhetor. In other words, the media may not actually be “fake,” but they are characterized this way as a means to discredit them and as a way to bolster a rhetor’s position. As Cooke suggests, it is “fact-based information or reporting that is negative or objected to is quickly and erroneously labeled as fake news.”<sup>22</sup> Because the label “fake news” can be used as a rhetorical and

<sup>16</sup> Victor Pickard, “The Big Picture: Misinformation Society,” *Public Books*, November 28, 2017, <http://www.publicbooks.org/the-big-picture-misinformation-society/>

<sup>17</sup> Bruce Bartlett, *The Truth Matters: A Citizen’s Guide to Separating Facts from Lies and Stopping Fake News in Its Tracks* (New York: Ten Speed Press, 2017): 97.

<sup>18</sup> Patrick Lencioni, *Silos, Politics and Turf Wars: A Leadership Fable about Destroying the Barriers that Turn Colleagues into Competitors* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006); Zizi Papacharissi, *A Private Sphere: Democracy in a Digital Age* (New York: Polity, 2010); Larry Sanger, “What \*Should\* We be Worried about?” *The Edge* (2013), <http://edge.org/response-detail/23777>.

<sup>19</sup> Alan C. Miller, “Confronting Confirmation Bias: Giving Truth a Fighting Chance in the Information Age,” *Social Education* 80 (2016): 276-279, 276.

<sup>20</sup> McIntyre, *Post-Truth*, 94, emphasis in original.

<sup>21</sup> Bartlett, *The Truth Matters*, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Nicole A. Cooke, *Fake News and Alternative Facts: Information Literacy in a Post-Truth Era* (Chicago: ALA Editions, 2018): 2.

argumentative strategy, we will focus on this particular aspect of the phenomenon now referred to as “fake news.”

### Making “Sense” of Common Sense

The neo-Marxist Italian, Antonio Gramsci, articulates how political ideology can percolate into a dominant form of power. Known as “hegemony,” the controlling cultural and political power in society germinates and is sustained by a form of legitimacy that is generated from the governed.<sup>23</sup> The key to hegemony that distinguishes it from authoritarian power is the fact that citizens consent to hegemonic power. As Gencarella notes, “Hegemony accordingly attends to consciousness, to ways of thinking. A regime achieves domination in part because others take its ways of thinking as the norm and come to accept their own status at the periphery.”<sup>24</sup> One way that the hegemony secures the consent of the populace is through the propagation of a political worldview, or common sense.

Groups or institutions in power can sustain their positions by offering citizens a way of thinking about their society in such a way that the hegemony is needed to maintain a safe or productive reality. In other words, the hegemony perpetuates myths, traditions, sets of principles, and cultural expectations that the populace unquestionably accepts because they believe that this conception of the world serves their best interests – even when in reality it may work against their best interests. To clarify, James Martin explains that,

... taking certain matters to be true – by using off-the-cuff remarks and figures of speech, for example – often reflects power relations in society, where commonplace understandings, or what Gramsci referred to as ‘common-sense’ thinking, have come to crystallize around certain practices and domains. ‘Common sense’ is a type of shorthand for an accepted way of reasoning that does not lay itself open to question but relies on our implicit acceptance of deterrence – and hence our complicity.<sup>25</sup> (p. 62)

Green and Ives further contend that “the common sense and worldview” of citizens tends “to be uncritical, unreflective, unsystematic, and operating with an incoherent conception of life and the world.”<sup>26</sup>

Gramsci also notes how language helps manufacture particular conceptions of the world, because languages “are hegemonic instruments which can reinforce the values of common sense or potentially transmit new ones.”<sup>27</sup> Since consenting to political and cultural ideologies is crucial for understanding hegemony, the idea of “common sense” becomes pivotal. Unlike the “common” understanding of the term that suggests basic knowledge, Gramsci’s notion of common sense argues that there are unquestioned assumptions and ideas that bind a common culture together. Gramsci explains that identifying common sense can be difficult since it is typically an incoherent,

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<sup>23</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (Quintin Hoare & Geoffrey Nowell Smith, Ed. & Trans), (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

<sup>24</sup> Stephen Olbrys Gencarella, “Gramsci, Good Sense, and Critical Folklore Studies.” *Journal of Folklore Research* 47 2010: 221-252, 222.

<sup>25</sup> James Martin, *Politics & Rhetoric: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2014): 62.

<sup>26</sup> Marcus E. Green and Peter Ives, “Subalternity and Language: Overcoming the Fragmentation of Common Sense,” *Historical Materialism* 17 (2009): 3-30, 9.

<sup>27</sup> Walter L. Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution: A Study of Antonio Gramsci’s Political and Cultural Theory* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980): 151.

fragmentary system of belief.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, common sense weaves a thread through society that permits it to cohere together – in essence, common sense uses narratives, myths, and traditions to, at least partially, explain a culture’s common fabric.

What makes Gramsci’s idea of common sense even more complicated is that he used it dialectically, much like he did his notion of hegemony. In other words, common sense is, on one hand, a way of depicting a belief system *status quo*, but it is also a method of transitioning into a new conception of the world. Occasionally Gramsci would refer to the “new” conception of the world as “good sense,” but he also referred to it as a “new” common sense. In either case, Gramsci believed that discursive reality could be altered from one conception to another.

While the liberatory potential of common sense *qua* good sense is important, the vital aspect of common sense is how it can engrain beliefs into citizens. It does so by fostering unquestioned beliefs and privileging taken-for-granted assumptions to constitute a larger “conception” of reality, or in Gramsci’s words, “conceptions of the world.”<sup>29</sup> The way that common sense operates is what is of most interest to this analysis. Gramsci does not dwell on the methods of common sense, but merely suggests that it occurs. He does, however, use examples – mainly from the Catholic Church – to illustrate his idea, which can be helpful to us. For instance, since the Church on one hand dictates that only a priest may perform a sacrament and a priest is a “conduit to God,” parishioners are unlikely to examine or question the rite given that it is dictated by the Church. Similarly, other institutions of power – like a government – can characterize or even create ways of thinking that seem benign while all the while reinforcing the power of the institution involved.

Based on some of Gramsci’s sporadic notes and congealing them together, we can establish a coherent and meaningful method of addressing discourse that attempts to explain in simple terms a particular “conception of the world.”<sup>30</sup> Additionally, Gramsci explains:

. . . philosophy is a conception of the world and that philosophical activity is not to be conceived solely as the “individual” elaboration of systematically coherent concepts, but also and above all as a cultural battle to transform the popular “mentality” and to diffuse the philosophical innovations which will demonstrate themselves to be “historically true” to the extent that they become concretely – i.e. historically and socially – universal. Given all this, the question of language in general and of languages in the technical sense must be put in the forefront of our enquiry . . . . Language also means culture and philosophy (if only at the level of common sense) and therefore the fact of “language” is in reality a multiplicity of facts more or less organically coherent and co-ordinated. At the limit it could be said that every speaking being has a personal language of his own, that is his own particular way of thinking and feeling. Culture, at its various levels, unifies in a series of strata, to the extent that they come into contact with each other, a greater or lesser number of individuals who understand each other’s mode of expression in differing degrees, etc.<sup>31</sup>

Having studied philology, Gramsci knew how language impacts the way a culture thinks about its condition. When a single individual considers their place in the world, language amplifies this notion, meaning that a person’s subjectivity is formed, at least in part, by the discourse surrounding them. This is similar to Althusser’s (1970) notion of interpellation. As Manders suggests,

Language, then, is constitutive of selves and the social world, for the process of its use implies subjectivity inscribing itself as moment of social reality . . . . Language cannot be divorced from the study of

<sup>28</sup> Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 325-326.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 348-349.

social reality and from subjective lived experience of that reality . . . Experience and meaning are intimately bound by interpretation . . . embodied subjective meaning – praxismic [sic], lived experience – is shaped within the practical contingencies of the social-political and ideological-interpretive processes of capitalist relations.<sup>32</sup>

As such, the way we look at language has a particular and meaningful impact on how we understand the role of ideology and the way individual subjects are implicated by such an ideology.

When thinking about common sense, of course, it begs the question: Why would free-thinking citizens endorse governing individuals and institutions that operate against the interest of the citizens? Why would anyone consent to policies that ultimately harm them? Although Gramsci explores a number of different components that constitute his conception of hegemony, for our purposes I believe we only need to describe one of them – *sensus communis*. In the United States, when someone casually refers to “common sense,” they usually mean a type of thinking that should be relatively obvious, unsophisticated, or simple, such as “it is common sense to not touch a hot stove,” or “it is common sense to not run into oncoming cars.” Unlike this common parlance of the term, Gramsci’s concept is much more nuanced. For Gramsci, common sense refers to the unquestioned cultural assumptions that people hold dear which form the underlying premise of their political ideology.<sup>33</sup> To clarify this idea, Gramsci referred to common sense as “popular superstitions”<sup>34</sup> and “the folklore of philosophy, and, like folklore, it takes countless different forms,” but “its most fundamental characteristic is that it is a conception which, even in the brain of one individual, is fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential, in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is.”<sup>35</sup> Similar to the concept of folklore, Gramsci recognized that many individuals believe strongly in political ideals because of socio-cultural myths that they have never been partially or entirely carefully considered. For example, we might say that marriage or home ownership are commonsensical aspects of a capitalist, consumer culture. Most Americans are raised to think that one day they will be married and own a house. For many families, these are simply expected without ever asking the simple, but critical question: Why? Why is it expected that we marry and/or own a home? Are the alternatives really worse or objectionable? Instead, most Americans go throughout life simply accepting the ideas that marriage and home ownership are cultural norms that just “make sense” and are expected. In fact, if we question such ideals openly, our peers may think there is something wrong with us for even second-guessing such commonly expected (or preferred) cultural traditions.

We must also stress that Gramsci firmly believed that it was the *way* a culture uses language and the *way* it thinks about language that helps foster notions of common sense. In other words, if we fail to critically question or reflect about the information that is communicated to us, then we simply absorb it and use it to base our behaviors. People use their phones for texting without considering the problems of texting or considering better options simply because other people text all of the time. When viewing television, we watch commercials as if they are a normal part of daily life, without questioning their subtle persuasive messages, the amount of advertising dollars used to produce and disseminate them, or how we actually pay for their annoying interruptions by way of purchasing items at higher prices. As Manders argues, “. . . within common sense philosophy-

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<sup>32</sup> Dean Wolfe Manders, *The Hegemony of Common Sense: Wisdom and Mystification in Everyday Life* (San Francisco, CA: San Francisco State University Press, 2006): 50-51.

<sup>33</sup> Joseph P. Zompetti, “Toward a Gramscian Critical Rhetoric,” *Western Journal of Communication* 61 (1997): 66-86.

<sup>34</sup> Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 396.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 419.



language there is a conception of the world. That it is implicit makes it no less real. The mass-popular philosophy of common sense, informing and embedded in daily praxis, is *knowledge* – distorted, fragmented and incomplete to be sure – of lived social (and social-psychological) reality as circumscribed by the ideological boundaries of capitalist hegemony.”<sup>36</sup> Therefore, language and culture operate to produce common sense.

When we apply common sense to the idea of “fake news,” it is important to keep in mind Gramsci’s definition that common sense is a belief system that is not carefully considered or thought about critically. Since we are looking at “fake news” as a marker attached to ideological positions contrary to the rhetor’s worldview, we can see how common sense applies to our understanding of this dynamic since adherents may not carefully reflect about the rhetor’s ideology. When thinking about this in the opposite direction (i.e., to reflect on ideology means to question the rhetor’s ideology), Gramsci notes, “To understand and to evaluate realistically one’s adversary’s position and his reasons (and sometimes one’s adversary is the whole of past thought) means precisely to be liberated from the prison of ideologies in the bad sense of the word – that of blind ideological fanaticism. It means taking up a point of view that is ‘critical.’”<sup>37</sup>

What is also interesting about using common sense to understand fake news is that Gramsci differentiated ideology from truth, and common sense fosters ideological acceptance, not necessarily persuasion about – or persuasion that produces – truth. According to Morera,

Truth, however, is a matter for critical consciousness, thus not always the same as efficiency or efficient ideology. For this reason, he distinguishes common sense from good sense, or the force of received ideas from critical consciousness. This distinction, critical to both his theory and his practice, necessitates the clear separation of truth and ideology or, as he puts it in his criticism of some historicist tendencies, ideology and science.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, when a group embraces common sense, it “is uncritically absorbed by the various social and cultural environments in which the moral individuality of the average man [sic] is developed, . . . and it contributes to the maintenance of hegemonic orders . . . .”<sup>39</sup>

But how does this help us as a method of excavating the meanings of ideology in texts? The first thing we must realize is that language creates a certain conception of the world. As such, it portrays a reality for us that we otherwise may not see. Another way of acknowledging this is that specific language creates a particular form of experience. When we hear or see certain news, for example, that news informs us of a specific issue. If we do not expose ourselves to other forms of news, then that single source primes us and constructs our knowledge of that particular issue. When other sources verify the initial source of news, our frame of reference is reified since it was a) already primed by the initial source, and b) it was probably confirmed by like-minded sources of information. In other words, ideological news is confirmed by an echo chamber of other outlets that are more than likely affiliated with the same, or similar, ideological worldview.

The next step in applying a commonsensical perspective of rhetoric is to examine how language is used in an “everyday” sort of way that explains our average understanding of the world.

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<sup>36</sup> Manders, *The Hegemony of Common Sense*, 56, emphasis in original.

<sup>37</sup> Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 344.

<sup>38</sup> Esteve Morera, “Gramsci’s Critical Modernity,” in Marcus E. Green (Ed.), *Rethinking Gramsci* (London: Routledge, 2011): 238-266, 263-264.

<sup>39</sup> Gencarella, “Gramsci, Good Sense,” 230.

We need to remember that common sense is the unquestioned acceptance of the world around us.<sup>40</sup> As such, common sense represents the manner in which a dominant ideology inculcates the mentality of the common person.

Finally, a method of applying common sense to rhetoric should reveal how such a philosophical understanding of the world occurs persuasively. In other words, how does common sense function rhetorically? In what ways can this manner of viewing the world be persuasive to average, everyday people? When we examine common sense in this way, we not only understand how it functions, but we also see how common sense operates rhetorically as a form of rhetorical strategy. Alternatively, we can now view how common sense functions as a rhetorical strategy for rhetors, especially political rhetors who need to “sell” their audiences on certain messages.

### **Fake News as an Argumentative, Rhetorical Strategy**

While citizens along the entire political spectrum can – and do – distrust media,<sup>41</sup> apparently conservatives are more likely to believe in inaccurate, conspiracy-laden, and fear-filled information. According to a recent study published in *Psychological Science*, conservatives tend to be more aware of potential dangers and are, thus, more attuned to believing messages centered on the hazards of our society, particularly if such news also relates to social issues, such as abortion or same-sex marriage.<sup>42</sup> According to McIntyre, this propensity to question the media is due to “negativity bias,” because “conservatives had a much higher probability of believing the false statements when they were threatening” because conservatives are primed to fear hazards.<sup>43</sup> The bottom line is that liberals tend to use more critical thinking skills than conservatives when it comes to processing news.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, conservatives may be more primed to believe that news is “fake” since President Trump uses the characterization frequently. In other words, when the President of the United States continuously characterizes the mainstream news as “fake news” and even “the enemy of the people,”<sup>45</sup> he is constituting a particular conception of the world; he is constructing a form of common sense.<sup>46</sup>

Now that we understand the theoretical perspective of the strategical use of certain rhetorical maneuvers, we can analyze how President Trump uses the term and concept of “fake news” as a rhetorical technique. When we investigate Trump’s discourse, we will see how the term “fake

<sup>40</sup> Joseph P. Zompetti, “The Cultural and Communicative Dynamics of Capital: Gramsci and the Impetus for Social Action,” *Culture, Theory and Critique* 53 (2012): 365-382.

<sup>41</sup> Laeeq Khan, “Trump Won Thanks to Social Media,” *The Hill*, November 15, 2016, <https://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/technology/306175-trump-won-thanks-to-social-media>

<sup>42</sup> Olga Khazan, “Why Fake News Targeted Trump Supporters” *The Atlantic*, February 2, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/02/why-fake-news-targeted-trump-supporters/515433/>

<sup>43</sup> McIntyre, *Post-Truth*, 57.

<sup>44</sup> Stevan Pfattheicher and Simon Schindler, “Misperceiving Bullshit as Profound is Associated with Favorable Views of Cruz, Rubio, Trump, and Conservatism,” *PLoS ONE* 11 (2016), <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article/file?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0153419&type=printable>.

<sup>45</sup> For example, Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump. February 17, 2017, 3:48 pm. <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/832708293516632065>; Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump. June 29, 2018, 11:07 pm. <https://twitter.com/TruthisReality1/status/1012910391834365952>; Donald J Trump, @POTUS Proxy. July 15, 2018, 11:18 am. <https://twitter.com/POTUSProxy/status/1018530287377158145>; Donald J Trump, @POTUS Proxy. July 20, 2018, 9:37 am. <https://twitter.com/POTUSProxy/status/1020316681477001217>; Donald J Trump, @POTUS Proxy. October 29, 2018, 7:09 am. <https://twitter.com/POTUSProxy/status/1056880634294161409>

<sup>46</sup> Nataly Pak and Matt Seyler, “Trump Calls ‘Fake News’ Media ‘the Real Enemy of the People’ Over Putin Summit,” *ABC News*, July 19 2018, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-calls-fake-news-media-real-enemy-people/story?id=56687436>

news” is used in at least five different ways. First, Trump utilizes “fake news” to enhance his authenticity as a rhetor while simultaneously undermining the *ethos* of the media. Second, Trump utters the phrase “fake news” to deflect from other, probably more important, issues. Third, like Aristotle’s “in a certain respect and simply” fallacy, Trump utters the phrase “fake news” to over-generalize and exaggerate political issues. Fourth, characterizing a political position as “fake news” creates a fear appeal to certain audience groups. Their growing distrust in the media is amplified by the President’s message, which means that paranoia and conspiracy theories become cultivated. Finally, by calling the media “fake news” and even “the enemy of the people,” Trump creates an “us versus them” framework that further polarizes an already divided electorate. In these ways, “fake news” becomes a rhetorical, albeit argumentative, trope that has particular persuasive appeal based on the common sense that has been constructed as a way of seeing the world.

### *Ethos*

When we examine Trump’s rhetoric writ large, we see that – in general – he is trying to establish a sense of authenticity. We know that Trump wants to use Twitter to communicate directly (and without the filters of the mainstream media) to the populace as a way of signaling a sense of authentic personality.<sup>47</sup> Trump even tweeted in July of 2017 that “My use of social media is not Presidential - it’s MODERN DAY PRESIDENTIAL. Make America Great Again!”<sup>48</sup> Indeed, many voters of the 2016 election claimed that Trump’s anti-politically correct positions and direct-to-the-masses tweeting crafted an authentic persona.<sup>49</sup>

When Trump deploys the “fake news” accusation, it “can serve as a power-shifting governance mechanism to delegitimize the institutional press as a whole. In that spirit, President Trump has deployed the ‘fake news’ trope to demonize and dismiss the traditional press as the ‘enemy of the American people.’”<sup>50</sup> Part of the strength in Trump’s argument is that he simultaneously discredits the *ethos* of the media when he calls them fake. *Ethos* simply means credibility; but, for Aristotle, *ethos* had three dimensions – expertise, reputation, and good will.<sup>51</sup> By using the argument of “fake news,” Trump is attacking all three components. If the media are fake, then they report inaccurate information. This would naturally undermine their expertise. A simple example of this happened immediately after the Midterm election: “To any of the pundits or talking heads that do not give us proper credit for this great Midterm Election, just remember two words - FAKE NEWS!”<sup>52</sup> When the media are considered fake, it also erodes their reputation for objectivity or accurate coverage of facts, such as when Trump tweeted, “Why was the FBI giving so much information to the Fake News Media. They are not supposed to be doing that, and knowing the enemy of the

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<sup>47</sup> Tamara Keith, “From ‘Covfefe’ to Slamming CNN: Trump’s Year in Tweets,” *NPR*, December 20, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/2017/12/20/571617079/a-year-of-the-trump-presidency-in-tweets>

<sup>48</sup> Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump. July 1, 2017, 5:41 pm. <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/881281755017355264>

<sup>49</sup> Conor Friedersdorf, “What Do Donald Trump Voters Actually Want?,” *The Atlantic*, August 17 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/08/donald-trump-voters/401408/>

<sup>50</sup> Lili Levi, “Real ‘Fake News’ and Fake ‘Fake News,’” *First Amendment Law Review* 16 (2018): 233-321.

<sup>51</sup> Aristotle. *The Art of Rhetoric*.

<sup>52</sup> Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump. November 7, 2018, 6:52 am. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1060153052676702208?lang=en>

people Fake News, they put their own spin on it - truth doesn't matter to them!"<sup>53</sup> Finally, when labeled "fake" or "the enemy of the people," the media are perceived as working against democracy and the best interests of American citizens. This is demonstrated in this tweet: "CNN and others in the Fake News Business keep purposely and inaccurately reporting that I said the 'Media is the Enemy of the People.' Wrong! I said that the 'Fake News (Media) is the Enemy of the People,' a very big difference. When you give out false information - not good!"<sup>54</sup> In so doing, their supposed good will for Americans becomes suspect.

These are all, essentially, argumentative appeals to *ethos* – either the rhetor appeals to their own credibility and trustworthiness, or they attempt to undermine the *ethos* of their opponent or rival. And, of course, we know that Trump often directly touts his own greatness and credibility. For example, "After having written many best selling books, and somewhat priding myself on my ability to write, it should be noted that the Fake News constantly likes to pore over my tweets looking for a mistake. I capitalize certain words only for emphasis, not b/c they should be capitalized!"<sup>55</sup> *Ethos* arguments date back to classical Greece, but it was the classical Roman rhetorician Quintilian who argued that good rhetoric was when a good speaker (*bonus vir*) speaks well.<sup>56</sup> Today, Trump can hardly be characterized as a "good speaker," but his use of *ethos*-based arguments enhances his credibility while eroding the trust in mainstream media.<sup>57</sup>

One of Trump's rhetorical appeals is authenticity. Since he typically speaks in a very unsophisticated, even rudimentary, manner, he – and his cadre – claim he speaks with an authentic voice. When he deploys the strategy of "fake news" in his tweeting repertoire, he enhances his authenticity. His authentic persona is also reinforced when he labels his opposition "fake news." When Trump had his summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin, this dynamic was obvious:

I got severely criticized by the Fake News Media for being too nice to President Putin. In the Old Days they would call it Diplomacy. If I was loud & vicious, I would have been criticized for being too tough. Remember when they said I was too tough with Chairman Kim? Hypocrites!<sup>58</sup>

-- And ...

I had a GREAT meeting with Putin and the Fake News used every bit of their energy to try and disparage it. So bad for our country!<sup>59</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump. June 17, 2018, 7:52 pm. [https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1008506045373845504?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1008506045373845504&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fabcnews.go.com%2FPolitics%2Ftrump-calls-fake-news-media-real-enemy-people%2Fstory%3Fid%3D56687436](https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1008506045373845504?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1008506045373845504&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fabcnews.go.com%2FPolitics%2Ftrump-calls-fake-news-media-real-enemy-people%2Fstory%3Fid%3D56687436)

<sup>54</sup> Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump, October 29, 2018, 7:00 pm. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1057059603605831680?lang=en>

<sup>55</sup> Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump, July 3, 2018, 6:13 pm. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1014286054805987330?lang=en>

<sup>56</sup> Quintilian. *Institutio Oratoria* (H. E. Butler, Trans.). Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1922).

<sup>57</sup> John McWhorter, "The Unmonitored President: Trump Is the First President Who, Rather than Striding Forward and Speaking, Just Gets Up and Talks," *The Atlantic*, July 20 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/07/trump-speech/565646/>

<sup>58</sup> Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump, July 20, 2018, 4:50 pm. [https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1020425741664751616?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw](https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1020425741664751616?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

<sup>59</sup> Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump, July 22, 2018, 8:15 am. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1021020863733420032?lang=en>

In this way, Trump uses the moniker of “fake news” to boost his authenticity and trustworthiness while simultaneously undercutting the credibility of his rivals and the media. Hence, this particular argumentative strategy not only serves to position Trump’s perspective as believable and true, but it also reinforces his commonsensical conception of the world. This common sense, left uncritically questioned and simply accepted *a priori*, strengthens Trump’s hegemonic influence.

### *Deflection from Other Issues*

A red herring fallacy is when a rhetor discusses one issue for the purposeful misdirection away from another issue. Typically, the issue the rhetor wants to avoid is either more important or potentially more damaging for the rhetor than the issue to which they deflect. According to Paul and Elder, a red herring occurs when “manipulators divert from the issue by focusing on what is irrelevant (but emotionally loaded).”<sup>60</sup> Similarly, the fake news argument can misdirect our attention from a highly relevant and salient issue to the distraction that the media’s reporting is false. This type of narrative reinforces the common sense conception of the world that the rhetor has constructed.

For example, in May of 2018, Trump tweeted, “Despite the disgusting, illegal and unwarranted Witch Hunt, we have had the most successful first 17 month Administration in U.S. history - by far! Sorry to the Fake News Media and “Haters,” but that’s the way it is!”<sup>61</sup> He boasts about his “most successful” presidency; yet, at that point he only managed to have one Supreme Court appointee confirmed, he signed a new Republican tax law, and he signed loads of Executive Orders, many of which have been challenged in court. Additionally, during May, there was a high school shooting in California and another in Texas, there was the NFL kneeling controversy, and Trump’s announcement of withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal.<sup>62</sup> Thus, Trump deflects from major crises and political problems by labeling such stories as “fake news,” while trumpeting his administration’s – ironically “fake” – successes.

Similarly, in August of 2018, Trump proclaimed on Twitter: “@Rasmussen\_Poll just came out at 48% approval rate despite the constant and intense Fake News. Higher than Election Day and higher than President Obama. Rasmussen was one of the most accurate Election Day polls!”<sup>63</sup> He lauds his own “success” despite that the news at the time involved a second woman who came forward alleging sexual assault against Trump’s Supreme Court nominee, Brett Kavanaugh, and there were three major shootings in two days – one in Pennsylvania, one in Florida, and another in Wisconsin.<sup>64</sup>

Additionally, in November of 2018, Trump continues this trend: “You just can’t win with the Fake News Media. A big story today is that because I have pushed so hard and gotten Gasoline

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<sup>60</sup> Richard Paul and Linda Elde, *The Thinker’s Guide to Fallacies: The Art of Mental Trickery and Manipulation*. The Foundation for Critical Thinking (2006): 37. <http://www.brahmakumaris.info/download/Cult%20related/Fallacies.pdf>

<sup>61</sup> Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump, May 17, 2018, 8:52 am, <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/997112687799697408?lang=en>

<sup>62</sup> *Infoplease*. May 2018 Current Events: US News (2018), <https://www.infoplease.com/may-2018-current-events-us-news>; *Infoplease*. May 2018 Current Events: World News (2018), <https://www.infoplease.com/may-2018-current-events-world-news>

<sup>63</sup> Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump, August 31, 2018, 9:25 pm, <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1035715271418413056?lang=en>

<sup>64</sup> *Infoplease*. September 2018 Current Events: US News (2018), <https://www.infoplease.com/september-2018-current-events-us-news#Three%20Shootings%20in%20Two%20Days>

Prices so low, more people are driving and I have caused traffic jams throughout our Great Nation. Sorry everyone!”<sup>65</sup> He declares this when the news of the day was Trump’s support for Saudi Arabia despite condemning CIA intelligence reports against the Saudis, Ivanka Trump’s use of a personal cell phone for government-related work, and the ongoing Mueller investigation.<sup>66</sup> And, of course, the only reported traffic jams were actually caused by weather-related problems, not the low gas prices he claimed and that are arguably also not due to any presidential actions.<sup>67</sup>

When understanding the impact of deflection, we need to remember that Paul and Elder describe how the emphasized issue from the rhetor is emotionally loaded.<sup>68</sup> Trump tends to highlight affective points in order to emotionally resonate with his audiences.<sup>69</sup> In fact, Grossberg argues that the “power of fake news is one of desire. It is propaganda that is speaking to its acolytes rather than to the enemy. It is demand-side propaganda.”<sup>70</sup> This coincides with persuasion by common sense. Since the audience unquestionably accepts Trump’s pronouncements, they do so by emotionally embracing his message rather than cognitively critically thinking about his arguments.

### *Overgeneralization and Exaggeration*

The “fake news” label is also used to overgeneralize and exaggerate political issues, although Trump uses it more for the latter. However, President Trump does overgeneralize how the mainstream media is “fake” when he points to a specific journalist or story or network. By focusing on a singularity, he then labels all mainstream media as “fake.” For example, he points to Joe Scarborough of *Morning Joe* to extrapolate to all mainstream media in this tweet: “Wow, @foxandfriends is blowing away the competition in the morning ratings. Morning Joe is a dead show with very few people watching and sadly, Fake News CNN is also doing poorly. Too much hate and inaccurately reported stories - too predictable!”<sup>71</sup> This, of course, suits his larger narrative about how Americans should distrust the media and, instead, place their faith in his conception of the world. This reinforces the dominant common sense that privileges Trump’s perspective on political issues despite the contrary claims emanating from media.

A much more common, yet related, strategy is when Trump exaggerates a particular topic as he references the “fake news” media. Before we explore how Trump uses the “fake news” label

<sup>65</sup> Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump, November 21, 2018, 6:36 pm. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1065403512559992832?lang=en>

<sup>66</sup> Josh Dawsey, “Trump Brushes Aside CIA Assertion that Crown Prince Ordered Killing, Defends Him and Saudi Arabia,” *The Washington Post*, November 22 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-brushes-aside-cia-assertion-that-crown-prince-ordered-killing-defends-him-and-saudi-arabia/2018/11/22/d3bdf23c-ee70-11e8-96d4-0d23f2aaad09\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.36a5bb1e52d3](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-brushes-aside-cia-assertion-that-crown-prince-ordered-killing-defends-him-and-saudi-arabia/2018/11/22/d3bdf23c-ee70-11e8-96d4-0d23f2aaad09_story.html?utm_term=.36a5bb1e52d3); Haberman, Maggie, & Nicholas Fandos. Democrats Plan to Investigate Ivanka Trump’s Use of Private Email Account. *The New York Times* (2018, November 20). <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/20/us/politics/democrats-ivanka-trump-email.html>; Marcin, Tim. Roger Stone, Donald Trump Ally Reportedly in Plea Negotiations with Robert Mueller. *Newsweek* (2018, November 23). <https://www.newsweek.com/roger-stone-donald-trump-ally-plea-negotiations-robert-mueller-jerome-corsi-1229456>

<sup>67</sup> DeLine, Jamie. First Snowfall Causes Traffic Jams. *ABC News 10* (2018, November 14). <https://www.news10.com/news/local-news/first-snowfall-causes-traffic-jams/1597558424>

<sup>68</sup> Richard and Elder, *The Thinker’s Guide to Fallacies*.

<sup>69</sup> Iyengar, Shanto, Gaurav Sood, & Yphtach Lelkes. Affect, Not Ideology: A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76, no. 4(2012): 405-431.

<sup>70</sup> Lawrence Grossberg, *Under the Cover of Chaos: Trump and the Battle for the American Right* (London: Pluto, 2018): 125.

<sup>71</sup> Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump, August 2, 2018, 6:04 am, <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1024974107337781248?lang=en>

for exaggerated purposes, we should note that he has always been fond of exaggeration as a rhetorical device:

One of the things I've learned about the press is that they're always hungry for a good story, and the more sensational the better ... The point is that if you are a little outrageous, or if you do things that are bold or controversial, the press is going to write about you ... That's why a little hyperbole never hurts. I play to people's fantasies ... people want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular. I call it truthful hyperbole. It's an innocent form of exaggeration – and a very effective form of promotion.<sup>72</sup>

Thus, from his book *The Art of the Deal*, we can see that Trump understands the persuasive utility of exaggeration. It should be no surprise, then, that he continues this practice in his tweets. A prime example of this is when Trump “reports” his approval ratings. For instance, he tweets in August of 2018 that “Over 90% approval rating for your all time favorite (I hope) President within the Republican Party and 52% overall. This despite all of the made up stories by the Fake News Media trying endlessly to make me look as bad and evil as possible. Look at the real villains please!”<sup>73</sup> This greatly exaggerates his approval ratings because, according to *Gallup*, at this same moment, the President’s overall approval rating was 41%. Another example concerns the detention facilities for immigrant children. Trump exaggerates the conditions of the facilities under his presidency compared to Obama: “Such a difference in the media coverage of the same immigration policies between the Obama Administration and ours. Actually, we have done a far better job in that our facilities are cleaner and better run than were the facilities under Obama. Fake News is working overtime!”<sup>74</sup> By any reasonable measure, Trump’s handling of these detention camps was disastrous and far from “better” than Obama’s policies.

Trump also exaggerates his foreign policy. Regarding Russia, the President overstates his relationship and meetings with Russia’s leader, Vladimir Putin: “The meeting between President Putin and myself was a great success, except in the Fake News Media!”<sup>75</sup> Later that morning, Trump continues: “While I had a great meeting with NATO, raising vast amounts of money, I had an even better meeting with Vladimir Putin of Russia. Sadly, it is not being reported that way - the Fake News is going Crazy!”<sup>76</sup> Similarly, Trump embellishes his relationship with North Korea’s leader, Kim Jong-Un, such as when he tweeted, “Many good conversations with North Korea-it is going well! In the meantime, no Rocket Launches or Nuclear Testing in 8 months. All of Asia is thrilled. Only the Opposition Party, which includes the Fake News, is complaining. If not for me, we would now be at War with North Korea!”<sup>77</sup>

In these ways, President Trump uses Twitter to advance his commonsensical conception of the world. He overgeneralizes and exaggerates his perspectives and policies in order to persuade his audiences that he does fantastic things, while his opponents and the media continue to report things

<sup>72</sup> Donald J Trump, *The Art of the Deal* (New York: Random House, 2009): 98.

<sup>73</sup> v Donald J Trump, @realDonaldTrump, August 26, 2018, 7:39 pm. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1033876658439245825?lang=en>

<sup>74</sup> Donald J Trump, @realDonaldTrump, June 25, 2018, 7:36 am. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1011226622324887556?lang=en>

<sup>75</sup> Donald J Trump, @realDonaldTrump, July 17, 2018, 7:21 pm. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1019376680572456960?lang=en>

<sup>76</sup> Donald J Trump, @realDonaldTrump, July 17, 2018, 9:22 am. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1019225830298456066?lang=en>

<sup>77</sup> Donald J Trump, @realDonaldTrump, July 3, 2018, 6:16 am. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1014105549624037377?lang=en>

incorrectly or inaccurately. Thus, his argumentative strategy of using “fake news” as a form of generalization and hyperbole reinforces his view of the world. The audiences that uncritically support these perspectives embrace the common sense emanating from his tweets.

### *Appeals to Fear and Conspiracies*

A key component to any argument, according to Aristotle, is *pathos*.<sup>78</sup> By using *pathos*, a rhetor appeals to the emotions of the audience as a way to resonate with them. Since argument focuses on persuasion, a *pathos* approach can be extremely effective. As we noted earlier regarding deflection, red herring arguments are typically premised with emotionally-laden values or issues. Here again we see the relevance and importance of *pathos*, or affective, appeals.<sup>79</sup>

A particular type of *pathos* appeal is the fear appeal. It is rather self-explanatory, but we should note that humans, especially Americans, tend to be influenced greatly by fear appeals.<sup>80</sup> Politicians and political pundits know this, which is why they use fear appeals so frequently.<sup>81</sup> Not only are fear appeals effective at persuading audiences to a particular perspective, but they also reinforce the rhetorical framing of common sense. If Trump, for example, can evoke fear by calling sources “fake,” then he can offer a solution that paints him as a savior, or, at the very least, an effective president and leader. He does this, for instance, when he tweets, “Censorship is a very dangerous thing & absolutely impossible to police. If you are weeding out Fake News, there is nothing so Fake as CNN & MSNBC, & yet I do not ask that their sick behavior be removed. I get used to it and watch with a grain of salt, or don’t watch at all.”<sup>82</sup>

Similarly, the “fake news” label can lend support for conspiracy theories. Simply by planting the seed of something conspiratorial, the rhetor can reinforce their particular conception of the world – and by mere suggestion characterize opponents as villains. For citizens who are predisposed to skepticism, the “fake news” argument can powerfully enhance their belief system, thereby reinforcing their commonsensical understanding of society. This occurs because conspiracy theories are “*constitutively* social” by believers who are not “intellectually responsible” and fall outside the realm of what is considered “reality” by “relevant epistemic authorities.”<sup>83</sup> In other words, conspiracy theories are typically political fiction that are based on some kernel of truth that becomes extrapolated to fit a particular worldview, or commonsensical framing of the world. For example, we know that media outlets have their political biases, but Trump uses this idea to generate a conspiratorial notion that the press must be advancing their own political agendas. For

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<sup>78</sup> Aristotle. *The Art of Rhetoric*.

<sup>79</sup> Shanto Iyengar, Gaurav Sood, & Yphtach Lelkes. “Affect, Not Ideology,” 405-431.

<sup>80</sup> Stefan Cartledge, Lorraine Bowman-Grieve, and Marek Palasinski, “The Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement in George W. Bush’s ‘War on Terror’ Rhetoric,” *The Qualitative Report* 20 (2015): 1905-1921; Krista De Castella and Craig McGarty, “Two Leaders, Two Wars: A Psychological Analysis of Fear and Anger Content in Political Rhetoric about Terrorism,” *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 11 (2011): 180-200; Melanie B. Tannenbaum, Justin Helper, Rick S. Zimmerman, Lindsey Saul, Samantha Jacobs, Kristina Wilson, and Dolores Albarracín, “Appealing to Fear: A Meta-Analysis of Fear Appeal Effectiveness and Theories,” *Psychological Bulletin* 141 (2015): 1178-1204.

<sup>81</sup> Kimberly Gross, “Framing Persuasive Appeals: Episodic and Thematic Framing, Emotional Response, and Policy Opinion,” *Political Psychology* 29 (2008): 169-192; Sean Richey, “Campaign Advertising and the Stimulation and Activation of the Authoritarian Personality,” *Political Communication* 29 (2012): 24-43.

<sup>82</sup> Donald J Trump, @realDonaldTrump, August 18, 2018, 6:32 am, <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1030779412973846529?lang=en>

<sup>83</sup> Neil Levy, “Radically Socialized Knowledge and Conspiracy Theories,” *Episteme* 4 (2007): 181-192, 181.



instance, he remarks, “There is nothing that I would want more for our Country than true FREEDOM OF THE PRESS. The fact is that the Press is FREE to write and say anything it wants, but much of what it says is FAKE NEWS, pushing a political agenda or just plain trying to hurt people. HONESTY WINS!”<sup>84</sup>

Part of the problem with conspiracy theories is that they are warrantless – they lack adequate reasons, or any reasons at all, to support their premises.<sup>85</sup> President Trump offers an example of this when he discusses the Mueller investigation: “Too bad a large portion of the Media refuses to report the lies and corruption having to do with the Rigged Witch Hunt - but that is why we call them FAKE NEWS.”<sup>86</sup> Since President Trump enjoys using Twitter to disseminate his political messages, the social media platform’s character restrictions and truncated form of mediation also encourage claims without warrants. Another problem with conspiracy theories concerns our haste to place responsibility on someone else, usually someone in power. Following the work of Karl Popper,<sup>87</sup> Sunstein and Vermeule argue that there “is a pervasive human tendency to think” that effects are caused by “intentional action, especially by those who stand to benefit (the “*cui bono?*” maxim), and for this reason conspiracy theories have considerable but unwarranted appeal.”<sup>88</sup> For instance, Trump likes to blame the mythic “deep state” for the problems of government: “The Deep State and the Left, and their vehicle, the Fake News Media, are going Crazy - & they don’t know what to do. The Economy is booming like never before, Jobs are at Historic Highs, soon TWO Supreme Court Justices & maybe Declassification to find Additional Corruption. Wow!”<sup>89</sup> Given Trump’s penchant for not taking personal responsibility for the country’s problems, the “fake news” argument allows him to suggest that media are to blame, thereby fostering a conspiratorial and commonsensical perspective.

For both fear appeals and conspiracy theories, the “fake news” trope is grounded in the notion of common sense. Trump tries to frame all opposing stories as “fake,” which Americans come to believe as true, thereby scaring citizens that the information they receive from the press is never true and possibly even illegal. Trump utilizes this type of conspiracy appeal when he claims: “Google search results for ‘Trump News’ shows only the viewing/reporting of Fake News Media. In other words, they have it RIGGED, for me & others, so that almost all stories & news is BAD. Fake CNN is prominent. Republican/Conservative & Fair Media is shut out. Illegal?”<sup>90</sup>

When citizens unquestionably accept a way of seeing the world that is proffered by a person in power (i.e., the President), then such a conception becomes a commonly accepted way of understanding. Emphasizing this dynamic, Sunstein and Vermeule note that “For most of what they believe that they know, human beings lack personal or direct information; they must rely on what

<sup>84</sup> Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump, August 16, 2018, 9:10 am. [https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1030094399362007040?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Cwterm%5E1030094399362007040&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.washingtonpost.com%2Fblogs%2Ferik-wemple%2Fwp%2F2018%2F11%2F07%2Fnot-praising-trump-enough-is-now-fake-news%2F](https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1030094399362007040?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Cwterm%5E1030094399362007040&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.washingtonpost.com%2Fblogs%2Ferik-wemple%2Fwp%2F2018%2F11%2F07%2Fnot-praising-trump-enough-is-now-fake-news%2F)

<sup>85</sup> Brian Keeley, “Nobody Expects the Spanish Inquisition! More Thoughts on Conspiracy Theory,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 34 (2003): 104-110; Cass Sunstein and Adrian Vermeule, “Conspiracy Theories: Causes and Cures,” *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 17 (2009): 202-227.

<sup>86</sup> Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump, August 5, 2018, 7:49 am, <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1026087766071947265?lang=en>

<sup>87</sup> Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.) (London: Routledge, 1966).

<sup>88</sup> Sunstein and Vermeule, “Conspiracy Theories,” 208.

<sup>89</sup> Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump, September 6, 2018, 6:19 am. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1037661562897682432?lang=en>

<sup>90</sup> Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump, August 28, 2018, 10:02 am. [https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1034456273306243076?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw](https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1034456273306243076?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

other people think. In some domains, people suffer from a ‘crippled epistemology,’ in the sense that they know very few things, and what they know is wrong.”<sup>91</sup> In yet another example, this time when discussing the Central American caravan of asylum seekers, Trump tweets, “The Fake News is not mentioning the safety and security of our Country when talking about illegal immigration. Our immigration laws are the weakest and worst anywhere in the world, and the Dems will do anything not to change them & to obstruct-want open borders which means crime!”<sup>92</sup> By reinforcing common sense, Trump also utilizes affect along with this argumentative trope to help persuade.<sup>93</sup>

### *Us vs. Them and Polarization*

Finally, when Trump labels news sources as “fake news,” he creates an “us versus them” relationship that heightens division and polarization. When a rhetor uses the “us vs. them” rhetorical strategy, they vilify their opponent by denigrating them and differentiating their positions.<sup>94</sup> For instance, Trump even refers to the “fake” news media as the “opposition” party: “THE FAKE NEWS MEDIA IS THE OPPOSITION PARTY. It is very bad for our Great Country....BUT WE ARE WINNING!”<sup>95</sup> This strategy can be very effective since it, in essence, stacks the rhetorical deck in favor of the political figure. As Zompetti describes, “by characterizing one’s position as morally just, on the side of truth, and yielding the maximum benefits, it automatically juxtaposes the ideological position in contrast with the polar opposite ideology. And, obviously, most audiences will want to side with the ideology that is moral, truthful, and beneficial.”<sup>96</sup> For instance, Trump appeals to Americans to side with him against the so-called “fake news” by claiming: “There is great anger in our Country caused in part by inaccurate, and even fraudulent, reporting of the news. The Fake News Media, the true Enemy of the People, must stop the open & obvious hostility & report the news accurately & fairly. That will do much to put out the flame....”<sup>97</sup>

The “us versus them” strategy is, by design, meant to divide the populace. Trump does not hide this sentiment when he barks, “The Fake News is doing everything in their power to blame Republicans, Conservatives and me for the division and hatred that has been going on for so long in our Country. Actually, it is their Fake & Dishonest reporting which is causing problems far greater than they understand!”<sup>98</sup> As Zompetti continues, “the polarizing rhetoric exuding from news media, Internet junkies, and political pundits dominates the conversations concerning politics. And, when citizens engage in political discussions, they often mimic the language and positions they

<sup>91</sup> Sunstein and Vermeule, “Conspiracy Theories,” 211.

<sup>92</sup> Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump, June 20, 2018, 7:25 am. [https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1009411866475532288?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1009411866475532288&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.washingtonpost.com%2Fpowerpost%2Ftrump-is-defiant-as-border-crisis-escalates-prepares-to-lobby-house-gop-on-immigration-bills%2F2018%2F06%2F19%2Fe20a108e-73c1-11e8-805c-4b67019cfe4\\_story.html](https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1009411866475532288?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1009411866475532288&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.washingtonpost.com%2Fpowerpost%2Ftrump-is-defiant-as-border-crisis-escalates-prepares-to-lobby-house-gop-on-immigration-bills%2F2018%2F06%2F19%2Fe20a108e-73c1-11e8-805c-4b67019cfe4_story.html)

<sup>93</sup> Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes. *Affect, Not Ideology*.

<sup>94</sup> Joseph P. Zompetti, *Divisive Discourse: The Extreme Rhetoric of Contemporary American Politics* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). (San Francisco: Cognella, 2018).

<sup>95</sup> Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump, August 16, 2018, 7:50 am. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1030074380397752320?lang=en>, emphasis in original.

<sup>96</sup> Zompetti, *Divisive Discourse*, 12.

<sup>97</sup> Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump, October 29, 2018, 7:03 am. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1056879122348195841?lang=en>

<sup>98</sup> Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump, October 28, 2018, 7:12 pm. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1056700376718684160?lang=en>

hear from those sources.”<sup>99</sup> Unfortunately, our nation experiences alarming rates of polarization and bitter toxicity.<sup>100</sup> Of course, when the “fake news” label is attached to media sources, the President depicts the mainstream news as the vilified “Other” while he places himself in the position of the victim, the martyr, or the champion of truth. To provide an idea into the sheer magnitude and frequency by which Trump demonizes the media, the Committee to Protect Journalists reports in 2019 that, “Trump has sent 1,339 tweets about the media that were critical, insinuating, condemning, or threatening. In lieu of formal appearances as president, Trump has tweeted over 5,400 times to his more than 55.8 million followers; over 11 percent of these insulted or criticized journalists and outlets, or condemned and denigrated the news media as a whole.”<sup>101</sup> A prime example of this occurs when Trump tweets, “The Fake News hates me saying that they are the Enemy of the People only because they know it’s TRUE. I am providing a great service by explaining this to the American People. They purposely cause great division & distrust. They can also cause War! They are very dangerous & sick!”<sup>102</sup> In so doing, the President reinforces his commonsensical conception of a world with his positions on the side of strength, fairness, and truth and the media and his rivals on the side of fake reality, anti-American “losers,” and enemies of the people.<sup>103</sup>

### Concluding Thoughts

Viewing President Trump’s tweets through the lens of Gramsci’s common sense reveals a couple of things. Initially, we learn *how* Americans are persuaded by the commonsensical notion of labeling opposing views as “fake news.” There are five different argumentative tropes that my analysis suggests. First, when rhetors use the argument of fake news (i.e., that competing and conflicting sources are fake news), the intention is that such an argument will be compelling; the rhetor is simultaneously discrediting oppositional perspectives and amplifying their own position, since one is “fake,” therefore the other must be “real” or “authentic.” This is what I call the “*ethos*” trope because it bolsters Trump’s credibility while undermining the trust of the media.

The second trope is deflection. Depicting opposing viewpoints from the media as “fake news” can misdirect the attention of the people and the media away from more pressing – and more threatening – issues to President Trump. A third rhetorical strategy is overgeneralization and exaggeration. Labeling a single news report or reporter as “fake” is often generalized by Trump to characterize all mainstream media. Similarly, Trump frequently embellishes particular inaccuracies, blunders, or other concerns to suggest that news stories as a whole are problematic.

<sup>99</sup> Zompetti, *Divisive Discourse*, xi.

<sup>100</sup> Lilliana Mason, “Ideologues Without Issues: The Polarizing Consequences of Ideological Identities,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 82 (2018): 280-301; NPR, Captivating America: Civility War, *NPR* June 27, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/06/27/623941631/captivating-america-civility-war>; David Smith, “Deep Divide: Kavanaugh Confirmation Fight Exposes America’s Bitter Fault Lines,” *The Guardian* October 5, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/oct/05/brett-kavanaugh-confirmation-america>.

<sup>101</sup> Stephanie Sugars, “From Fake News to Enemy of the People: An Anatomy of Trump’s Tweets,” *CPJ blog* January 30, 2019, <https://cpj.org/blog/2019/01/trump-twitter-press-fake-news-enemy-people.php>.

<sup>102</sup> Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump, August 5, 2018, 6:38 am. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1026069857589227520?lang=en>,

<sup>103</sup> Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump, September 17, 2016, 8:13 am. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/777133433915002880>; Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump, January 7, 2018, 2:35 pm. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/950103659337134080>; Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump, October 29, 2018, 7:03 am. [https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1056879122348195841?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctw-camp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1056879122348195841&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.vox.com%2Fpolitics-and-politics%2F2018%2F10%2F29%2F18037894%2Fdonald-trump-twitter-media-enemy-pittsburgh](https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1056879122348195841?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctw-camp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1056879122348195841&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.vox.com%2Fpolitics-and-politics%2F2018%2F10%2F29%2F18037894%2Fdonald-trump-twitter-media-enemy-pittsburgh)

A fourth argumentative maneuver is using the marker “fake news” to engage in fear and conspiracy appeals. By portraying the news media as “fake,” Trump foments distrust in their work. When coupled with the phrase “enemy of the people,” Trump depicts the media as a fear-mongering threat to American democracy. This naturally encourages some audience members to believe in media-related conspiracies, especially if they pertain to schemes that are aimed at attacking or eroding Trump’s presidential authority.

A final argument strategy that emerges from this analysis is how Trump uses “fake news” as a way to create an “us versus them” dynamic between the American people and the media. Regarding virtually all political issues, Trump uses the identifier of “fake news” to characterize the media as “the enemy of the people.” This heightens an already politically polarized society, especially since many in the media, while not perfect, try to be the watchdog against governmental scandals, abuse of power, and incompetency.<sup>104</sup>

We should note that these strategies can, and often do, overlap. For example, using “fake news” to instill fear against the media is also a polarizing “us versus them” maneuver. Because they can operate as an argumentative assemblage, the rhetorical force of these strategies can be amplified in the minds of certain audience members. For instance, if we use the above example of the dual function of “fake news” as a fear appeal and an “us versus them” maneuver, citizens who are compelled by fear may likely have intensified feelings about those who hold different political opinions, and they most certainly will have intensified feelings as they view the media as “the enemy.” This type of hyped divisiveness contributes to an extremely toxic political environment where common ground or respect for different perspectives becomes virtually impossible. This type of rhetorical maneuver is also reinforced when Trump refers to the “fake news” of the *New York Times* as “the enemy of the people,” thereby conjoining a fear appeal with the attack on the media’s *ethos* by overgeneralizing from a specific news outlet that is also a form of deflection from the Mueller investigation. This happens, for instance, when Trump argues that “The Failing New York Times wrote a story that made it seem like the White House Council had TURNED on the President, when in fact it is just the opposite - & the two Fake reporters knew this. This is why the Fake News Media has become the Enemy of the People. So bad for America!”<sup>105</sup>

The second major implication of this study is that a common sense analysis of Trump’s rhetorical maneuver of “fake news” illuminates *why* Americans are compelled to accept his conception of the world. Of course, citizens who are already predisposed to believing Trump’s political ideology naturally adhere to his messages. Others are convinced because Trump’s conception of the world has become a dominant narrative simply because he is the President. As such, he uses Twitter as the new presidential bully pulpit, which reinforces his ideological doctrine. If a citizen demographic fails to expose themselves to alternative perspectives, or if they discredit other perspectives because they are “fake,” or if they embrace Trump’s common sense notions without critically reflecting on them, then they are likely to embrace Trump’s political assumptions, similarly to the way Gramsci argued about the influence of common sense. As Stephen Marche so

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<sup>104</sup> Megan Garber, “Trump’s War against the Media Isn’t a War: You Need Two Sides for That,” *The Atlantic*, September 27, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/09/washington-post-editor-were-not-at-war-were-at-work/541344/>; Margaret Sullivan, “Trump and the Watergate Effect,” *Columbia Journalism Review* (2017), [https://www.cjr.org/special\\_report/trump-watergate-russia-washington-post.php/](https://www.cjr.org/special_report/trump-watergate-russia-washington-post.php/).

<sup>105</sup> Donald J Trump, @RealDonaldTrump. August 19, 2018, 6:01 am. [https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1031134125602820096?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1031134125602820096&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fthehill.com%2Fhomenews%2Fadministration%2F402506-trump-hits-new-york-times-for-report-implying-white-house-counsel-is](https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1031134125602820096?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1031134125602820096&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fthehill.com%2Fhomenews%2Fadministration%2F402506-trump-hits-new-york-times-for-report-implying-white-house-counsel-is).

poignantly reminds us, “A people of screens will inevitably choose screened people to lead them.”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Stephen Marche, “Celebrity Warfare: Image and Politics in the Age of Trump” *Los Angeles Review of Books* May 23, 2017, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/celebrity-warfare-image-politics-age-trump/#!>, np.