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# **WHEN FAKE NEWS MAKES THE NEWS**

A study of journalistic boundaries

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## Abstract

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This thesis takes a spearheaded look at a modern, much-talked about concept of misleading information known as "fake news", and how traditional journalists have handled its emergence with regards to their professional boundaries. Built on the premise that who and what is to be considered journalism is a constant battle continuously fought between professional journalists and actors trying to lay claim to their professional territory, through the use of qualitative ethnographic content analysis of 88 journalistic texts, the study's aim is to take initiative in academic concept development of how to define fake news, and explore in what ways traditional journalists have defended their professional boundaries, in light of the threat provided by the increasing prevalence of misleading content in the information ecosystem, as well as by an anti-establishment, critical-of-traditional-media post-truth culture.

Fake news is identified and defined as a microcosm of concepts containing one type of 'pure' fake news content, and four other types of misleading content. The textual analysis on boundary work reveals an offensive stance where, in line with previous research, fake news and post-truth culture is expelled from the boundaries of journalism as deviant information-actors who pose a threat to liberal, western-style democracy. At the same time, using different rhetorical techniques, traditional journalism and its practices are reaffirmed to their audience as the proper alternative of gathering and presenting information, as well as a prerequisite for a healthy democracy.

Put in a context of the future of news, the thesis argues that the results indicate a possibility that fake news and post-truth culture might act as a "fifth estate", keeping traditional media in check, as they feel the need to eschew sensationalism and gossip for quality journalism to keep themselves separated from fake news and other post-truth content.

*"Real news is great, son, but I'm getting a thousand hits  
an hour with grade-A bullplop".*

*/Homer Simpson*

(The Simpsons, Season 12, Episode 6. December 3, 2000).

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 The emergence of a new concept

December 4th, 2016, Washington D.C. USA. Hungry Washingtonians, and possibly a few tourists and out-of-staters, are digging into the warm crust, stringy cheese and favourite toppings of their Sunday afternoon-pizza. Suddenly, dinner is interrupted by the entrance of a man, dressed in t-shirt and blue jeans, carrying a handgun and an AR-15 assault-style rifle, which he aims it at one of the restaurant employees. Chaos ensues. Employees hide and customers flee to nearby stores for safety as the man opens fire. Fortunately, no one, except for a door, suffers any physical damage (MPD, 2016; Kang & Goldman, 2016).

The man was later going to tell authorities that he was at the pizza parlour to "self-investigate" what was now known as "*pizzagate*", a conspiracy theory that he read about online through false news items, also known as "*fake news*", that linked presidential candidate Hillary Clinton to a child-prostitution ring that supposedly was headquartered in the pizzeria basement. After finding no evidence that children were being harboured in the restaurant, the gunman surrendered to the police (Kang & Goldman, 2016).

While this was not the first time, and certainly not the last, someone got misled by false information, it was arguably the moment when the term "fake news", and its potential danger to society, became a household concept in western society. The amount of Google searches for the term were the then-highest ever during the days of *pizzagate*, and has since been matched only during US president Donald Trump's inauguration (Google, 2017), which itself contained another episode of fake news controversy, as White House press secretary Sean Spicer accused the media of reporting incorrect numbers with regards to the crowd size at the inauguration - something Spicer was then accused of doing himself (Davis & Rosenberg, 2017), which was later famously defended by the White House through a claim that Spicer's numbers were "alternative facts" (Swaine, 2017).

Since then, the neologism fake news have been, as they say, everywhere. It has been discussed, picked apart and scrutinised by scholars of such diverse academic fields as media studies (Giglietto et. al), medicine (Kucharski, 2016), and philosophy of science (Malik, 2017), as well as in the public eye by everyone from journalists, working in many different countries and media systems (see e.g. Carson, 2017; Larsson, 2016; Soll, 2016) and politicians (Löfvén, 2017), to business leaders (Sjöström, 2017) and librarians (Sahlstedt & Spolén, 2017). Even the Pope weighed in on the issue, somewhat peculiarly comparing disseminators of fake news to people who have a morbid fascination for human excrement (TT-Reuters, 2016). The country of Sweden has somewhat ended up at the centre for a lot of this discussion, as many of the fake news-items in circulation has claimed to reflect events that supposedly had happened in Sweden (see e.g. Moreno, 2017; Mosesson, 2017)

All the discussion and debate has led to practical and policy measures being taken as well. Authorities are educating government-branches about the risks of external influences during elections (Göteborgs-Posten, 2017), and public schools are sending their teachers to courses in source criticism (Wahlstedt, 2017). Meanwhile, fact-checking websites and initiatives are launched

by both journalistic- state and private actors in several countries (Jurjaks, 2017; Khaldarova & Pantti 2016), and the EU have ordered the European External Action Service to publish weekly disinformation bulletins that tracks the existence and origins of disinformation planted in the European information ecosystem (Appelbaum, 2016). Even the journalistic tradition of publishing a hoax story on April fools day was cancelled in 2017 by many publications in the wake of the increased fake news-debate (TT, 2017). The topic has indeed been so much on everyones lips that it got to the point where president Trump at a White House press conference could be heard uttering the rather amusing meta-phrase "this fake news was indeed fake news" (Helmerson, 2017).

Meanwhile, amidst all this hype and commotion, this modern concept of misleading information is currently challenging traditional journalism on two fronts. False information, dressed up as legitimate news, is eroding the public's trust in traditional news media and diminishes their role as main facilitators of information and agenda-setters. At the same time, a worldwide, widespread anti-establishment movement, including creators and disseminators of the fake news-items, that prays on this eroding trust - a post-truth era - has gained footing in many countries and regularly accuses traditional media for being biased, untrustworthy, and fake (Helmerson, 2017; Pazzanese, 2016; Pettersson, 2017; Wolodarski, 2017). When faced with challenges like these to their fundamental ways of defining, gathering, processing and presenting information, i.e., to do their job, journalists commonly engage in boundary work, a rhetorical practice where the professional boundaries of what is to be considered journalism and who is to be considered a journalist are stipulated and maintained (Hindman, 2005). This study is about fake news, what it is, and how Swedish journalists have discussed it from the perspective of their professional boundaries.

## **1.2 A study in two parts**

As journalist is not a protected title, like doctor or surgeon, the professional boundaries of the occupation are constructed by the professionals themselves, and these boundaries are continuously challenged and reconstructed by tensions and disruptions (Carlson, 2015; Lewis, 2012). As Carlson (2015) puts it: "*The survival of journalism as an occupation depends on its credibility, which is gained through the collective behavior of its practitioners.*" (p. 22). Thus, scholars encourage a focus on the boundaries construction and negotiation as an important part of understanding the logic of the news paradigm, i.e., how information is gathered and presented, and to capture how the journalism field develops in relation to newer media, and competing claims about reality (Lewis 2012, Bennet et. al., 1985, Gieryn, 1983). Careful attention to these boundary struggles can reveal the future shape of news (Carlson, 2015), something that has been debated about for a long time as many traditional newspapers have struggled to stay afloat in recent years (Ekman, 2017; Wolodarski, 2017). Studying boundary work helps to understand how different professions forge and maintain distinctions between professionals and amateurs, producers and users, journalists and non-journalists etc., and how these are continuously reconfigured in a world of ever changing circumstances (Lewis, 2012). Looking at boundary work in a Swedish context is especially interesting as, besides as previously mentioned having a lively public debate about the concept and being the origin for a lot of the false stories going around, Sweden is considered to be an

'archetype' of a media system where journalists display high levels of autonomy, distinct professional norms and ethical rules, and a strong orientation towards an ethic of public service (Hallin & Manicni, 2004). Therefore, the journalistic paradigm can reasonably be argued to stand very strong amongst Swedish journalists, who will then, according to the theoretical framework of boundary work, feel a strong need to defend this paradigm as it is challenged by fake news and post-truth culture. As boundary work in journalism is most commonly performed in newspapers, particularly their editorial sections (Berkowitz, 2000), newspaper texts by Swedish newspaper journalists will make out the empirical material for this study.

To be able to examine how traditional journalists have discussed the fake news concept properly though, we first need a full understanding of what the concept actually means. Because despite all the debate about it, it's still not always clear exactly what someone is referring to when they are using the term "fake news". It's been used in the public debate as a way to describe propaganda, so called alternative media, fictional news items made for monetary or satire purposes, errors in reporting, hoaxes made to provoke, and established media outlets such as CNN and BBC (Khaldarova & Pantti 2016; Berkowitz & Schwartz, 2016; Wardle, 2017; Helmerson, 2017). The wide usage of the term, and the lack of a single clear definition, suggests that it is concept, or an umbrella-term, blended together by several different occurrences of false and misleading information that needs to be understood on their own, as well as in relation to the concept. The concept of Fake news itself is not on its own either, but is often discussed in relation to the previously mentioned "post-truth era" or "post-truth politics" - a label for "*circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief*" (Oxford, 2016). Fake news is generally seen as a part of, or result of, society having moved towards a post-truth era (Lenas, 2017).

The one thing that seems to be in agreement however, is that fake news consists of news items involving information that is considered misleading to different degrees. The concept thus indeed warrants a closer look, as widespread prevalence of such information is a matter of public concern, with evidence of widespread misleading information leading to health issues, violent conflict and harmful decision-making (Lewandowsky, et. al., 2012 & 2013). Generally, access to good information is widely regarded as critical to functional and healthy democracies as these rely on an informed populace (see eg. Kuklinski et. al., 2000; Giglietto et.al., Bennet, 2003; Zaller, 2003; Exoo, 2010; Lewandowsky; 2012), which means a better understanding of fake news is imperative to better understand the quality of western democracy.

All in all, the considerable public discussion and extensive publicity around the fake news concept provides an excellent opportunity to start moving it into an academic setting, by trying to sort out and define what fake news actually is, as well as an excellent opportunity to study boundary work at a time where traditional journalism might be fighting its biggest battle yet to defend their fundamental ways to define, gather, process, and present information, doing so in a country that has ended up somewhat in the middle of the whole ordeal so to speak. This study will, thusly, add to the budding, but still very modest, literature of fake news taxonomy, as well as to the existing literature of boundary work in journalism, which is currently well-stocked with studies of boundary work



linked to specific events, but lacks examination of boundary work relating to a continuous, threatening phenomena such as fake news and post-truth, and that has also been predominately US and UK-centric. Additionally, the study provides research of a new type of misleading information, adding to the ever-growing literature on misleading information.

### 1.3 Study aim and research questions

The aim of the study can thus be viewed as in two parts, where each part is guided by a general research question. The first part is concentrated on concept development around fake news taxonomy. It concerns the definition of the modern concept of fake news, and is guided by the ostensibly simple question:

- **What is fake news?**

What is the origin of the concept? What is it comprised of? Where does the content come from and how is it disseminated? How is it being defined by scholars, journalists and other relevant actors?

The goal is to arrive at a model that conceptualises the fake news concept in a rich yet effective definition. The second part of the study is more empirically guided and concerns the professional boundaries of journalism, and how they have been challenged by the fake news concept and post-truth culture, and reconstructed by journalists. It's guided by the following question:

- **How, in the light of fake news and post-truth culture, do journalists work to defend their status as society's only legitimate producers and presenters of true and fair information?**

How do the journalistic community in Sweden discuss fake news and post-truth culture in relation to their role as professional journalists, and the journalistic paradigm as a whole? What can this tell us about the future of newswork?

The following two chapters will provide background and theoretical perspectives relevant for answering these research questions. First we will take a closer look at the fake news concept, its history, its components and its definition. The chapter ends with a model visualising the concept, used to answer the first research question. The second chapter of literature overview will take a look at previous research on professional boundaries and boundary work, and operationalise these theories into a journalistic setting. The paper will then move into its empirical section with a discussion of method and selections, followed by a presentation of the results, before concluding with a reconnection and discussion of the research questions, as well as a look into the future of both newswork and academic fake news-research.

## 2. Part I - Understanding fake news

As mentioned in the introduction, to be able to examine how journalists are discussing fake news, we must first understand what the modern concept of fake news actually is. In a general sense to move closer to conceptual cohesion among those interested in examining the concept, and more particularly to aid the second, empirical part of this study. With such a diverse concept, used in the public debate in so many different ways, are we even sure that the different journalists are talking about the same thing? To better be able to grasp this, we need to define fake news. Doing so will also answer the first of our two research questions, the simple question with the complex answer - what is fake news?

The following chapter will start by a quick look at some of the related concepts that move in the same circles as fake news, and that will be mentioned and used throughout the study. These related concepts are used to form a frame for understanding the concept. This is followed by an overview of the history and current literature regarding fake news, until we reach the chapter's conclusion with a discussion and presentation of this study's definition of fake news, in form of a model visualising the concept and its channels of origin and distribution.

### 2.1 Related concepts

As we shall see during the course of this paper, the modern fake news concept is a contemporary reiteration of a number of different components that has been combined under one umbrella term. To make a proper definition of fake news, there are some related concepts which needs to be understood that regards publishing of material which could be considered untrue against objective facts, i.e., misleading information - namely - the concepts of post-truth, propaganda, mis- and disinformation and news satire. So before we dive into the actual definition of fake news, this section summarises in short order the most relevant related concepts that will form a frame around which to discuss how to define the concept.

#### 2.1.1 Post-truth

The modern fake news concept is often mentioned as a part of, or a result of, a larger, modern, political and/or societal culture or worldview dubbed the "post-truth era/age" or "post-truth politics" (see eg. Jönsson, 2017a; Carroll, 2016; Carson, 2017; Lenas, 2017; Avellan, 2016; Pettersson, 2017). Described by Oxford dictionaries, where it attained "word of the year" status in 2016, as "*relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief*", the term post-truth has been in use since at least 1992. Until recently, it's been sporadically used in junction with commentary on political instances of deceit, such as the Iran-Contra affair of the late eighties (Flood, 2016), but also to describe the rise of the amount of lies in our society, and our increasingly indifferent approach to lies in general (Keyes, 2004).

The main trait that defines this post-truth culture is how members of it, be it politicians, opinion-leaders, journalists in alternative media, or simply citizens, continue to repeat and

propagate points and alleged facts, and as well from an audience standpoint to approve of the information given, even if these arguments and facts are proven false by for example traditional news media or independent experts. A common example of post-truth culture is the respective campaigns of then presidential candidate Donald Trump, and the "vote leave" side in the 2016 UK EU-referendum, commonly referred to as "Brexit". The former made, according to non-partisan fact-checking organisation politifact.com, 129 "false", or "mostly false", statements out of 169 during the time period examined. While these false or misleading statements were criticised by large portions of the traditional news media, the backlash in voter support usually seen when politicians are found out to be lying never occurred (Pazzanese, 2016), and Trump went on to win the election. Similarly, the Brexit campaign was often accused of similar truth-bending that didn't stop when corrected. For example, the "vote leave"-side made extensive use of the argument that EU-membership cost Britain £350 million per week that could be better used elsewhere. This figure was heavily exaggerated and misleading, but even when rejected by fact-checks (Reuben, 2016), and labeled as "misleading" by the UK Statistics Authority (Dilnot, 2016), the "vote leave"-side still used it as a cornerstone of their campaign all the way up to voting day. Another protruding trait of post-truth culture is a distrust, and in some cases loathing, of traditional news media, who are frequently accused of being biased and not connected to the large public. Instead, the accusation goes, traditional journalism pushes heavily for an elite agenda of globalism and political correctness. This leads to, in the views of post-truth, untruthful or biased reporting, and omissions or neglect of certain stories that might harm this agenda (Wolodarski, 2017; Hirvonen 2013; Pettersson, 2017; Helmersson, 2017)

Both the terms post-truth politics and post-truth era, and some other less common ones such as "Trumpism", are being used to describe the same phenomenon. For the remainder of this study however, the suffix "culture", as in "post-truth culture", will instead be used to signal its reach beyond the political sphere, and to highlight that other cultures, such as journalism culture for example, are affected by it as well. This post-truth culture can be thought of as including politicians and other opinion leaders who has internalised post-truth politics, and the media outlets, mostly represented by so called alternative media, and citizens who fuel their agendas and opinions, and vice versa.

Seeing as how post-truth culture and the fake news concept is so commonly used and discussed in connection with each other, this study will assume the fake news concept as a part of post-truth culture, meaning that boundary work that defends the journalistic paradigm against post-truth culture, for example statements critical of the media by Donald Trump, will also be considered as relevant to see how journalists have approached the fake news concepts.

### **2.1.2 Propaganda**

Propaganda is a common label used to describe fake news, and the creation and spread of fake news might very well be part of a propaganda operation. Jowett & O'Donnell (2012) describe propaganda as "*a form of communication that attempts to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist*" (p. 1). It's also commonly defined as "*organized persuasion*" (p. 3). It's purpose is usually "*to convey an ideology to an audience with a related objective*" (p.3) and it can be both

*agitative*, as in attempting to rouse an audience into active change, and *integrative*, as in attempting to render an audience passive and unchallenging (p.17).

Propaganda is regularly split up into three types - "white", "grey" and "black" propaganda - based on its stated source and presentation. *White propaganda* openly discloses its sender and tend to carry accurate information. It is presented in a way that suggest the sender is a "good guy" with the best solutions or ideology and it attempts to build credibility for future usefulness. Examples could be overt patriotism in relation to national celebrations or sporting events. *Black propaganda* is presented as published by someone other than the original sender, or with no disclosed source or sender at all. It includes all types of creative deceit, and is used to spread lies, fabrications and disinformation, for a wide range of deceptive purposes. Examples could be fabricated intelligence, or forged documents, photos or emails, leaked to traditional media or published through own channels (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012; Cull, et. al., 2003). *Gray propaganda* falls somewhere in-between. The correct source may or may not be revealed, and uncertainty exists about the accuracy of the information. Cited examples often include instances where actors have publicly denied something that was later proven to be correct, such as when CIA denied have any involvement in the project Radio: Free Europe, yet was responsible for organising and funding the radio station that was used for propaganda purposes. It also includes public embarrassment of an enemy, such as when Radio Moscow basked in schadenfreude over the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr, derogating the US in the process (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012).

Understanding propaganda in relation to journalism, Jowett & Donnell argue, is to "*understand how news management or "spin" shapes information, emphasizing positive features and downplaying negative ones, casting institutions in a favorable light*" (p.1). It can be heavily framed or completely made up stories that are planted in the information eco-system, deliberately designed to push one's cause, weaken adversaries, or simply to provoke general instability or distrust in a society which forms a context where it's easier to get any message across (Jowett & O'Donell, 2012; Khaldarova & Pantti, 2016).

### **2.1.3 Mis- and disinformation**

As mentioned in the introduction, the one thing seemingly agreed upon around fake news is that it is essentially some type of misleading information. Research on such information is commonly divided into misinformation and disinformation. *Misinformation* are items of information circulating in the information eco-system that are false or factually incorrect, and can be disseminated both with and without intention to mislead (Lewandowsky et. al., 2012). Examples of its effect on society can be seen in issues where there is a strong, scientific consensus, yet a mixed or weak public perception of the findings, such as the issue of climate change. E.g. well over 90% of domain experts are said to be in agreement that man-made global warming is currently affecting our globe, yet "*the consistency and strength of scientific opinion differs markedly from the comparatively low public concern about climate change in at least some countries*" (Lewandowsky, et. al., 2013 p. 494). Misinformation can have its origin from rumours and myths but also governments and vested interests, as well as from journalistic mistakes and statements given by misinformed experts and other public figures. It's often resistant to correction, meaning that

individuals who have come to believe a piece of misinformation rarely alter their view or opinion even after being presented with the correct information. Ambiguity aversion, wishful thinking in the face of uncertainty, and the fact that individuals' worldview can override objective facts has been identified as reasons for this (ibid.).

Internet has elevated the spread of misinformation to unprecedented levels, as the gate-keeping function of news editors is being bypassed (Lewandowsky et. al., 2012). The rise of so called echo chambers in the wake of the increased use of social media to gather information, where individuals' feeds are tailor-made by algorithms to suit their interests and worldview has been noted as a particularly fertile soil for misinformation to grow (Lewandowsky et. al., 2012; Garrett, 2009). Misinformation in the context of journalism can be embodied by for example journalistic mistakes, such as misinterpretations of incidents or published quotes where the quoted source misspoke or possessed erroneous knowledge.

When misinformation is intentionally disseminated to deceit or misled, it's regarded as *disinformation* (Goldbeck, 2009). Disinformation is often used in covert propaganda operations, and is thus often considered a part of black propaganda, as suggested by KGB's black propaganda department aptly being named "dezinformatsia" (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012). Disinformation can take any wide array of shape or form, both in text and other mediums, but it's not uncommon for it to be forged news items, planted in the information eco system to weaken one's opponent. The intelligence offices of the USA and Soviet/Russia - the CIA and the KGB/Foreign Intelligence Service respectively - have both had plenty of disinformation operations revealed to the public eye. For example, former CIA officer John Stockwell has admitted to planting a widely reported story about Cuban soldiers who supposedly were caught raping Angolan women and consequently executed. Even a faked photograph of the firing squad that carried out the 'assassination' was published. KGB on its part once tried to stir up racial tension in the US by fabricating pamphlets full of racist propaganda against african-americans, calling for a campaign against the "black mongrels" who were erroneously said to loot Jewish businesses, claiming the source to be the Jewish Defense League (JDL). At the same time, counterfeit letters were sent to civil-right organisations, providing false accounts of atrocities committed by the JDL towards african-americans (Cull, et. al., 2003). Disinformation in relation to journalism can for example be embodied by the previously mentioned fabricated stories created by intelligence services and then planted in newspapers.

The relevance and importance of good information for healthy, functioning democracies has been widely recognised in the scientific community (see eg. Kuklinski et. al., 2000; Giglieto et.al., Bennet, 2003; Zaller, 2003; Exoo, 2010; Lewandowsky; 2012). Firstly, on a societal level, if a majority believes in something that is factually incorrect, the misinformation may form the basis for political and societal decisions that contradict a society's best interest (Lewandowsky et. al., 2012; Kuklinski et. al, 2000). For example, more than 90 % of relevant scientists agree that the current warming of the globe is man-made climate change. This differs markedly from public concern about the issue in many countries (Cook et. al., 2014). While several reasons might amalgamate to this, there is "sufficient grounds for the conclusion" that systematic dissemination of mis- and

indeed disinformation about climate change is a barrier to political action and mitigation (Lewandowsky et. al., 2013, p.494). False and wrong information could also be harmful on an individual level. For example, badly interpreted information about a link between vaccination and autism, has led to an increase in vaccine-preventable disease (Lewandowsky et. al., 2012). As evident from the tale of *pizzagate* in this paper's introduction, there's also a very real possibility of these stories leading to citizens setting up vigilante groups or engaging in mob justice, something that evidently can endanger human lives.

#### **2.1.4 News satire**

News satire, or news parody, is fabricated or out-of-context news items that are created or put together for humorous purposes. It was, at least within academia, the owner of the epithet "fake news", up until recently when the term became a modern concept on its own, however it was used more as a label than a definition (Berkowitz & Schwartz, 2016; Balmas, 2012). It borrows the same topics and issues as its non-comedic counterpart, as well as its general aesthetic presentation, but where it differs is obviously in its news gathering practices and production. Free from any ethical codes by the virtue of comedy, purveyors of news satire are free to fabricate, mock and parody, with the intention to create comedy, and sometimes criticise traditional media, rather than to relay factual information about current events. Examples of news satire is the online based "news"paper *theonion.com* and late night TV talk shows such as *The Daily Show on Comedy Central*.

News satire has both been lauded for its intrinsic critique of, and watchdog-role over, traditional news media, as well as criticised for its blurring of the lines between 'real' and 'fake' information (Berkowitz & Schwartz, 2016). Studies have shown that some satirists, such as John Stewart, in some instances have a higher degree of trust than traditional journalists, because of the perception that Stewart holds 'real' journalists accountable, even though Stewart's own journalism is heavily distorted for comedic effect. Instances of fabricated news satire being published by traditional news under the assumption that it is real are not uncommon (see eg. Rubin, 2015; Giglietto et. al., 2017; Berkowitz & Schwartz, 2016) and can be considered misinformation that is then entered into society's information ecosystem, where it might be believed as true by some recipients.

## **2.2 Fake news**

While the societal harms and propaganda effects of fake news can be derived from research regarding the concepts in the previous section, there is very little academic literature that specifically regards the modern fake news concept and its definition. This section starts by tracing the history of the concept, followed by an overview of academic literature and other relevant actors trying to define the concept. The section finishes with the conclusion of the chapter, and the answer to the first research question, in the form of a visual conceptualisation of the fake news concept.

### **2.2.1 Brief history of fake news**

Seeing as fake news is seemingly comprised of several components that are already well-researched, one might get confused as to why it is of such importance in society right now. To

understand what's actually new about the modern fake news concept, we have to rewind the clock a bit first.

As previously mentioned, the conjoined elements that make up the modern fake news concept has been around since long before pizzagate, Trump or Internet. Going back as far as ancient Rome, the first emperor of the Roman Empire, Octavian, famously used a campaign filled with disinformation about his adversary Marc Anthony's affair with Cleopatra to aid his victory in the final war of the Roman republic. As society evolved, inventions such as the printing press fuelled the spread of knowledge and news, and it didn't take long for false information to enter the information eco system. During the 18th century, unverifiable stories were plentiful about lurking sea monsters, witch accusations, and how sinners were responsible for natural disasters. In 1761, Marc-Antoine Calas, the son of a respected Protestant merchant in Toulouse took his own life. Catholic activists spread false news reports that it was Calas Sr. who killed his son, allegedly in anger because the young man wanted to convert to catholicism. Calas' father was convicted on the rumour-based testimony and executed. These atrocities caught the eye of Voltaire who wrote counter arguments dissecting the case, and the Calas story became one of the touchstones for the Enlightenment (Soll, 2016; Carson, 2017).

However, neither the Enlightenment nor the scientific revolution could stop the fake news weeds from sprouting. By the 19th century, modern newspapers came on the scene, promising scoops and investigating exposés. And while this brand of objective journalism went of to become a successful, even the dominant, business model for news media, sensationalism always sold well. Thus, at this time, embedded in what we now consider traditional journalism, was purposely planted fake stories to increase circulation. The New York Sun for example established themselves as a leading, profitable newspaper based off of a hoax story claiming there was scientific evidence for a alien civilisation on the moon (Soll, 2016, Love, 2007).

As mass communication grew in scale, so did the persuasive power of propaganda. During the political- and ideological turmoils during the 20th century, false information was a big part of military strategies. The British instigated widespread propaganda against Germany to win public support for World War 1, and the Germans were no strangers to propaganda themselves during the lead-up to World War 2, when the Nazi party, among other things, published pamphlets containing false accounts of events to spur discrimination of Jews and other minorities. During the actual war, all sides had their propaganda machines in full effect across the entire media spectrum, including news media (Carson, 2017).

As the world's ideological struggles became less intense, and populations became aware of, and used to, the techniques used in mass communication, the effect of large scale mass media propaganda waned, and during the cold war era, state propaganda shifted to more subtle means, as well as other venues such as sporting events and advancements in space and other technologies (Jowett, 2012). However, this was far from the end of false information masqueraded as legitimate news. It would namely be the case that as the cold war reached its end, another big player in the dissemination of false information was just about to lace up his shoes. Enter: the internet.

The emergence of widespread, fast-connection internet in most corners of the world has considerably changed the playing field for false information dissemination in one major way: cost. Before internet, being able to spread false information, gaining an audience willing to listen, and in particular monetising this activity, was virtually impossible. Firstly, publishing and distributing information on any kind of moderately large scale needed logistic operations that came at a hefty price, not affordable for an average citizen. Secondly, as information spread slower, building an audience took much longer and keeping them interested was much harder. Since this trust was expensive to gain, being accused of publishing fakes would damage a newspaper's reputation and thus make it suffer economic consequences. Lastly, as the high costs associated with distribution of information led to far fewer actors in the information eco-system, these were very easy to regulate, and mostly complied to existing media laws. To deliberately publish fakes would likely lead to a newspaper being sued, and/or approached by legal authorities, but this control is almost fully lost on the internet (Carson, 2007).

Around 2007, 'Web 2.0', shift to more interactivity and user generated content on internet websites, and the social media revolution was in full effect. Social networks like Facebook and Twitter made the spread and exchange of information easier and on a much larger scale than ever before, while drag-and-drop platforms such as Wordpress allowed anyone with an internet connection to set up a functional, professional-looking website with ease and at a very low cost - if any. This removed all of the three thresholds for widespread dissemination of false information. As publishing and distribution costs have approached zero, anyone with just a bit of computer savviness can publish information that looks legitimate, and alone spread this to an unprecedented number of eyes. Given the lower costs and better opportunities to spread information, building an audience willing to listen doesn't take nearly as much time, nor is it as expensive, and reputations are far more expandable. The lower costs also lead to far more actors being involved in the information eco-system, which in turn made it essentially impossible to regulate (Carson, 2007).

### **2.2.2 Defining fake news**

How the modern fake news concept is defined will currently most likely differ depending on whom you would ask. The heated public debate about the concept's definition, its effects on democracy in general and the US election in particular, and who or what is to be considered "fake", has created a heavily polarised debate, where the concept has taken the shape of a catch-all term to discredit any kind of stories one disapproves of (Carroll, 2016, Larsson, 2016). After first bursting on to the scene as a term used by traditional journalists and politicians to describe the made-up or heavily distorted stories in circulation, often with an anti-immigration/globalism/islam-angle, published by less reputable media sites from all corners of the web, the term was later 'appropriated' by the same people accused of spreading it in the first place (Larsson, 2016). As post-truth culture in many countries have adopted an anti-establishment approach, traditional news media has come to be seen by them as run by an elite, firmly in the pockets of that very establishment. A sort of deadlock has thus been reached, where both "sides" are calling the "other side" out for spreading fake news (Helmerson, 2017; Carroll, 2016). However, there are attempts being made by scholars, other experts, and most of all by journalists themselves, to define this disconcerting concept.



In academia, the literal term "fake news" has, roughly up until 2015-2016, largely encompassed only news satire and parody, such as TV-shows like *Daily Show with John Stewart*, more recently Trevor Noah, or websites like *TheOnion.com* (see e.g., Love, 2007; Balmas, 2012; Berkowitz & Schwartz, 2016). However, after *pizzagate*, the US election, and the many ongoing investigations regarding information warfare in the western world, scholars have started to use the fake news-moniker in much the same way as it is used in public debate (Giglietto et. al., 2017; Rubin et. al., 2015; Khaldarova & Pantti, 2016).

Academic literature is still playing a bit of catch-up on this subject however, and thus no generally agreed-upon definition of fake news is available in the scientific community. However, a few small steps are currently being taken towards more conceptual coherence. Giglietto et. al. (2017) argue, on the basis of misleading information research, that focus needs to be shifted from "*the diverging effects misleading information has on the audience/citizens, to the shared features that characterizes the way both true and false information spread*" (p. 6-7). To distinguish between different types of fake news, one has to account for the judgement and/or motivations of the original creators of the news item, as well as the judgment and/or motivations of those who further disseminate the content. Putting this into practice, a four-way matrix is presented containing the possible combinations between the judgement of the original creator and the propagator. This in turn leads to four different types of fake news dissemination, which are labeled as: (1) *pure disinformation* - when both the original author and the propagator are aware of the "false" nature of the information; (2) *misinformation propagated through disinformation* - when information is originally produced as "true" and subsequently shared by a propagator who think it is "false"; (3) *disinformation propagated through misinformation* - when information is devised as "false" by the creator but perceived as "true" by the propagator; and finally (4) *pure misinformation* - when "false" information is perceived as "true" by the creator and by the propagators. The strength of this model lies in its use of the intentions and motivations of those who create, and of those who then disseminate the fake news-items. However, a big draw-back is the confusing use of the concepts of "true" and "false". It is, in all honesty, a bit hard to keep track on when the term "true" relates to a sort of objective, factual truth, and when it relates to a more subjectively perceived truth within an individual.

Former research director at Columbia Journalism School, Claire Wardle (2017) argues in a similar fashion that the fake news definition is about more than simply news, and that it concerns the entire information ecosystem. She proposes an approach where the concept is broken down into three elements: the different types of content, the motivations of those creating this content and the different ways and motivations of disseminating this content. The types of content she differentiates between sits on a loose scale that measures intent to deceive. From low intent to high, the seven types are: (1) *Satire or parody* - no intention to cause harm but has potential to fool; (2) *False connection* - when headlines, visuals or captions don't support the content; (3) *Misleading content* - misleading use of information to frame an issue or individual; (4) *False content* - When genuine content is shared with false contextual information; (5) *Imposter content* - when genuine sources are impersonated; (6) *Manipulated content* - when genuine information or imagery is manipulated to

deceive; and finally (7) *Fabricated content* - New content that is 100% false, designed to deceive and do harm. By mapping the different types of contents with the motivations behind their creation and dissemination, she concludes, albeit from a work in progress, that there are distinct patterns forming in terms of how different types of content are created for specific purposes, and how some of the different types are created for the same purpose. For example, (7) *fabricated content* can be created for the purpose of parody, to provoke or "punk", profit, political influence or for classic propaganda. This approach of deconstructing the fake news concept into more than news shows some promise, as it might help understand the complexity of the concept. However, there is an argument to be made that including basically all types of questionable information in one particular concept becomes a bit overwhelming, and perhaps more suiting for the even broader concept of post-truth. A theoretical framework in it's core should "*limit the scope of the relevant data by focusing on specific variables and defining the specific viewpoint*" (USC, 2017) as such, considering the broadness of items related to the fake news concept, it seems to be better off trying to narrowing it down rather than to expand it beyond the literal word "news". To quote Isaac Newton: "*We are to admit no more causes of natural things than such as are both true and sufficient to explain their appearances*" (Hawking, 2003, p. 731). For example, Wardle relates "bad journalism" to three different types of fake news content, as opposed to a more pragmatic view that journalistic mistakes are never a fake or a lie, and thus shouldn't be considered a type of fake news content.

Rubin et. al. (2015) comes from the field of library and information science and ambitiously sets out to create a fake news detection system that can automatically filter out potentially deceptive news. While listing more technical conditions needed of any data to be able to run in these sort of detection systems, the authors also distinguish between three types of fake news: (1) *serious fabrications*, i.e., actual fraudulent journalism, as was the case with previously mentioned Jayson Blair, also includes unverified "click-bait" news; (2) *large-scale hoaxes*, a deliberate fabrication or falsification, posed as legitimate news and sometimes picked up by traditional news sources; and (3) *humorous fakes*, comprised of satire and news parody like theonion.com (Rubin et. al., 2015).

Additionally, politically progressive, non-profit media research and information centre, Media Matters for America, define fake news as "*information that is clearly and demonstrably fabricated and that has been packaged and distributed to appear as legitimate news*". They argue for a narrow definition to distinguish fake news from other types of misleading information, so as to clarify that fake news was "*created and presented in a way meant to deceive consumers into thinking it is real.*" (Media Matters, 2016).

Finally, journalists writing about how to define fake news have adopted similar currents of thought, although often times not as elaborate. Most often, fake news is defined by journalists as either completely false information created to generate clicks and revenue, or false or heavily distorted information created by governments or other stakeholders for political purposes. Satire is virtually never included in the journalistic definition, nor is any kind of erroneous information published by traditional newspapers. It is considered unfortunate, but not a part of the fake news

concept (cf. e.g. Carson, 2017; Larsson, 2016; Helmersson 2017; Hunt, 2016; Mattsson, 2017a; Jurjaks, 2017; Mosesson, 2017).

## **2.3 Modelling a new definition**

While sorting through all the different definitions presented by scholars, journalists and other relevant actors, and by looking at actual fake news-items and the investigative reports on them and their creators, a couple of things stood out. Firstly, it struck me as important that the definition is broad enough to showcase the large spectrum of mis- and disinformation that makes up the modern fake news concept, but no too broad, or else one runs the risk of basically listing all potential sources of information in a society, saying that they all can be used for deceit in different ways. Secondly, similar to the arguments made by Media Matters, for any false item of information to be called fake news, it has to make an active effort to resemble legitimate news (Media Matters, 2016). False information spread as regular Facebook or Twitter-posts with no link to any news article, or as memes, image-macros and so on, is sometimes touched upon by those trying to make sense of the concept, but should thus not be included. While the spread of false items like this indeed can constitute a societal problem in the same way fake news does, it has nothing to do with news, and is arguably traceable to old instances of societal myths, lies and gossip, rather than published information about current events. While fake news is indeed a part of the mis- and disinformation sphere, it should, by virtue of its origins, be distinguished from other types of mis- and disinformation that doesn't purports to be a news item.

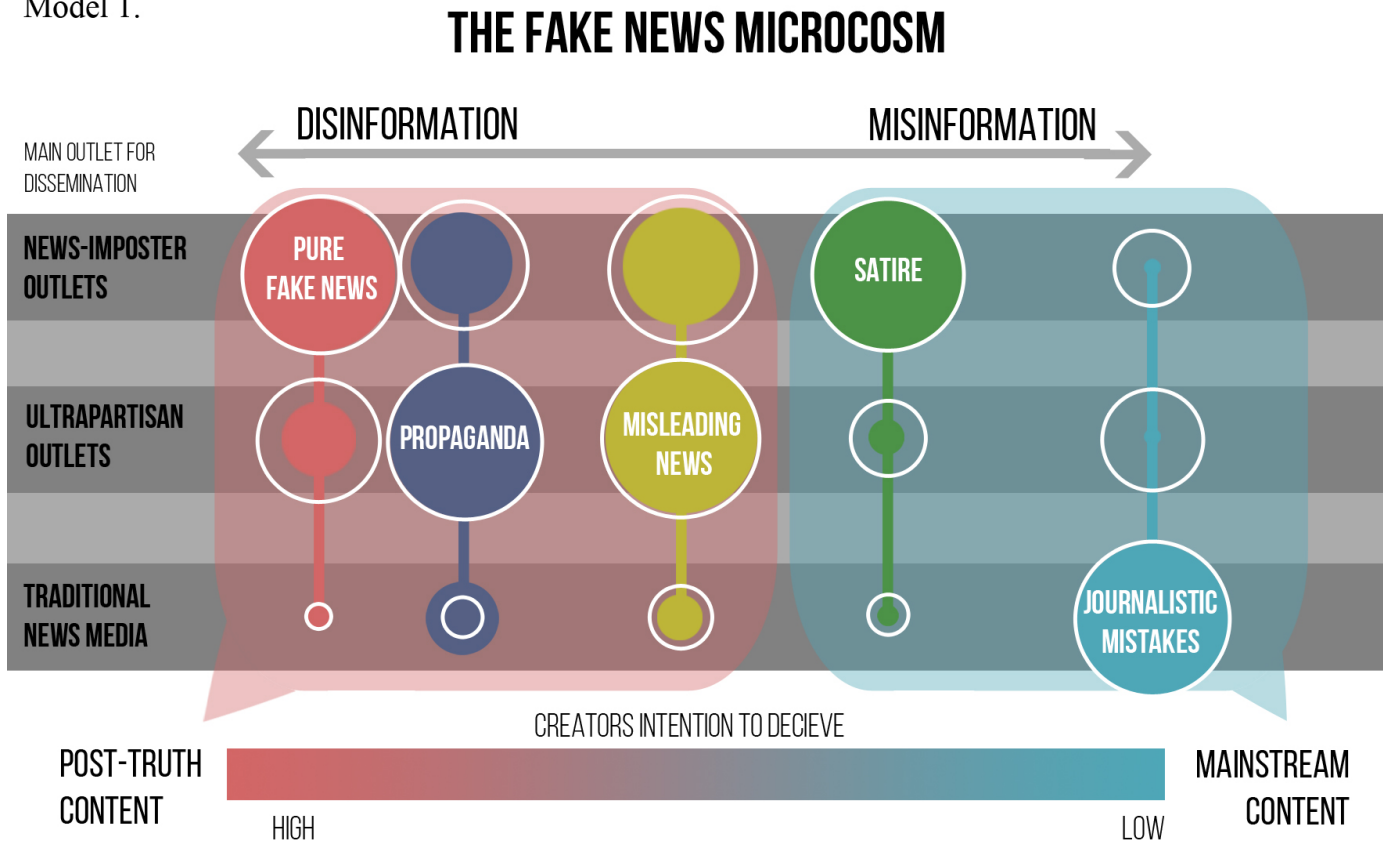
What also need to be considered is that during the initial reporting of major political events, war and other breaking controversies, individual reporters might be accused of partisanship, lying or withholding information, as a consequence of reported errors in the press, stemming from cases where the need to provide information, any information, overpowers the need for verified information (Lewandowsky et. al., 2012; Rubin et. al., 2015). As both Wardle (2017) and Giglieto et. al., (2017) touches on, the motivations behind both the creators and the main disseminators need to be addressed, and thus fake news should only concern news items that were purposely created to deceive. An honest mistake is not a lie. Additionally, the term fake news should never be applied to a particular news outlet, individual or actor. It is not something you can be or represent, it is, and should always be referred to as a specific item or group of items of, indeed false, information.

Based on all of this, I argue that the concept can be thought of as its own microcosm, containing five different types of misleading information split into two categories based on intention to deceive. These types of content consists of one 'pure' definition of the actual term 'fake news', and several related types of news-items that has been grouped under that same umbrella but isn't really fake news in its purest form. However, these related concepts can, under certain circumstances, assume the shape of 'pure' fake news, similar to the definition presented by Media Matters (2016). This way of thinking allows us to have a clear and narrow definition of fake news, while still including all the different variables that help fake news thrive and spread in our information ecosystem. This definition can advantageously be presented as a visual model, as will follow,

together with an explanation of the graphics. This model can be viewed as the answer to the first research question - what is fake news?

## 2.4 Visualising the fake news microcosm

Model 1.

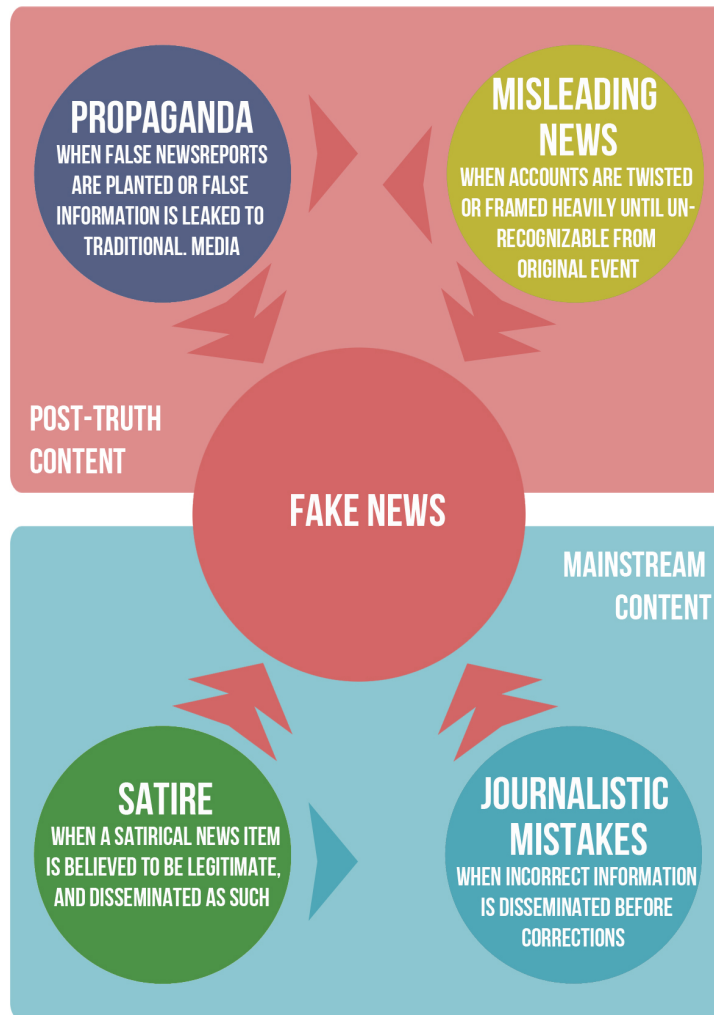


CIRCLE SIZE INDICATE ROUGH ESTIMATE OF MOST LIKELY ORIGIN OF THE CONTENT

WHITE CIRCLE SIZE INDICATE ROUGH ESTIMATE OF THE PROPORTIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF DISSEMINATION ACROSS THE DIFFERENT OUTLETS

The first model (better resolution available in appendix 1, p.73) is, in its most basic form, a classification of different, types of misleading information, identified as the most relevant of those typically contained within the fake news concept. There is a total of five types of content, sitting on a horizontal scale from disinformation to misinformation. Disinformation is regarded as misleading information where the creator intentionally planned to deceive, whereas misinformation is regarded as misleading information that was spread unintentionally, or with no purpose to deceit. Vertically, the different types of content are grouped after their main channel of origin, and where these types of content are most commonly disseminated. The colour-filled circles represent a rough estimate of the likelihood of origin for the different type - the larger the circle the likelier that the type has its origin within that channel. The white lined circles represent a rough estimate of the proportion of dissemination across the different outlets - a large circle means a high proportion of the dissemination of this type of content is being done in this channel. This first, basic look gives us two categories of content: post truth content - containing the three types of content with the most

Model 2.



intention to deceive, *pure fake news*, *propaganda* and *misleading news*; and mainstream content - the two types of misleading content with the least intention to deceive, *news satire* and *journalistic mistakes*. Detailed descriptions of these different types of content are given below, but first we move on to a short description of model 2, which illustrates how the four types of content not considered as pure fake news still has the ability to take shape, or be "weaponized" (Media Matters, 2016) as fake news, under certain circumstances.

In the second model then (better resolution available in appendix 2, p.74) besides illustrating when the different types of content could be considered as taken the shape of fake news. The horizontal arrows to and from the propaganda and misleading news types of content, and from satire to journalistic mistakes, are to indicate how these types of content relate to each other, as misleading news can in certain instances be propaganda, and propaganda can come in the shape of the misleading news-type of content, both of which can then assume the shape of pure fake news, at least until its sender or the creators real motivation is revealed. Similarly, news satire, a news item that is de facto fake, still needs to be published by a legitimate source to be considered as taking the shape of fake news, as then it then becomes a false article declaring to be a real one. When posted on the satire-website, even if it's made to look like a legitimate news-item, it's most often openly stated as satire somewhere on the site.

## **2.5 Five types of misleading content**

As mentioned, this model produces a definition of the fake news concept where there are only one type of misleading content that is considered pure fake news, and four other types of content that circles within the fake news-microcosm, and that can assume the shape of fake news if certain conditions are met. These different types of misleading content are split up in post-truth content, which includes high level of intentional deceit and includes *pure fake news*, *propaganda* and *misleading news*; and mainstream content, which includes low level of intentional deceit and includes *news satire* and *journalistic mistakes*.

### **2.5.1 Pure fake news**

Starting with "pure" fake news then, it refers to news items that are completely fabricated, or, with the use of completely fabricated facts and/or connections, extremely distorted versions of actual events, made to look like legitimate news, with the intention to fool the reader into thinking that it in fact is legitimate news. They are created for monetary purposes, either by placing ads on the article itself, or by driving traffic to another website. This type of content is the "head of the Voltron", the ultimate iteration of the concept fake news. It is literally news that are fake. Not news that are propaganda or news that are heavily biased. It's, again, literally fake news. Examples of this content were plentiful during the US-election, for example, an unemployed Macedonian teenager put together an article stating that Obama had joined ISIS. He admittedly cared nothing about american politics, but simply wanted to generate "clicks", and had come to realise that lies about politicians, immigration and terrorism generated the most income, and couldn't believe that people believed the article to be true (Mosesson, 2017).

While other types of content indeed can set out to look like legitimate news stories, their motivations, to parody or for propaganda for example, gives them an origin somewhere in society that is not journalism, in those examples comedy and politics respectively. Pure fake news has no origin in that sense. Its purpose is money, so its origins could be considered poverty, rather than anything else. Pure fake news isn't conceived in a top secret government meeting or around a comedy writers-table. It's simply homemade 'journalism' trying to look like legitimate journalism. Its origin could, in this sense, be said to be closest to the business side of journalism - it's about publishing stories to make money.

### **2.5.2 Propaganda**

The second type of content is propaganda, and refers to false or misleading information in the shape of forged articles or document leaks to journalists, that are written or relayed to make their way into the information ecosystem and thus advance the goal of the propagandist. It also includes forged intelligence, correspondence or incidents that are purposely leaked and then reported on by traditional journalists. Its most often produced in the form of black or gray propaganda, and agitative to borrow a term from propaganda research, meaning it seeks to rouse its audience into action, for example by creating news items that might lead to public demonstrations, as the example below will show. The creator of this type of content is always another state or interest group who is seeking to benefit politically from the message purveyed in the propaganda. Propaganda takes the

shape of fake news when a government, or any other vested interest group, creates and disseminates a text that meant to be taken as a legitimate news item by the recipient, in other words, what FBI is accusing Russia of doing in the US election. Another example is the "Lisa case" in Germany, where a 13-year old Russian-German named Lisa was reported as missing by her parents. When she showed up the next day, she claimed she had been raped by three men of a "foreign southern" appearance. When it was later found out that she had really stayed the night at a friends house, Russian media had already agitated a hostile atmosphere among Russian-Germans in Germany, and by the time the police communicated the true story on social media, demonstrations against chancellor Angela Merkel were plentiful in Berlin and around Germany. Many experts suspected and labeled this as information warfare by Russia, used to create instability, hostility towards immigrants and increase the support to leave EU, which would benefit Russian trade, and was taken aback by how well mobilised the Russian information warfare seemed to be (Jurjaks, 2017).

### **2.5.3 Misleading news**

Misleading news-content refers to news items that are based on events that actually occurred, or official reports that actually exists, but where certain events or facts have been twisted, changed or put out-of-context to convey an opinion or frame an event or an individual in a certain light. It can also refer to heavy sensationalism and sponsored content. These type of news items are often shared together with pure fake news, which could be an attempt by propagandists to blur the line between fake and real, and make audiences more friendly towards the fully fabricated stories, a well-documented tactic (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012). Propaganda and misleading news have a close relationship as many instances of misleading news could be considered propaganda, and many propaganda-operations are turned into misleading news-type content. As an example, after new years celebrations in Germany, the American "alternative media"-outlet Breitbart ran a story suggesting that several north-african males had lit a church on fire while chanting "Allahu akbar" ("god is great"). The news item was heavily disseminated on social media, but turned out to be false, as the police reported indeed a rowdy night, but not more than usual. There was indeed a fire, but it was in a net tied to some scaffolding next to the church that was lit by some fireworks. Chants of "Allahu akbar" was also confirmed, but were coming from a group of Syrians celebrating the truce recently proclaimed in their home country (Jurjaks, 2017). Depending on how and why this piece of misleading news is presented and spread, for example, if it comes from a government operation of information warfare, it should be considered as propaganda. If created and uploaded by a civilian, without contact or help from any political group or organisation, it should be considered misleading news. In the case of the German new years celebrations, investigations showed that many of the heavy disseminators of the story were Russian bots, aimed at Russian-Germans living in Germany. Thus, as the news item had its origin in a true story, heavily "cured" by ultra partisan outlets, it was a case of misleading news that was then used as propaganda. A type of content like this could also be considered as a piece of misleading news in the shape of fake news, if details of the account were even more twisted to make it completely unrecognisable from the original event.

It should also be noted that this type of content can as well exist in the mainstream-content category in form of heavy sensationalism in traditional news media, as well as some "clickbait"

articles written with very questionable facts as base, such as articles that might state "10 foods that make you lose 10 lb.'s in 10 minutes" and similar matters, as well as sponsored content made to look like a legitimate news story. Misleading news-type of content can then take the shape of fake news by either twisting and sensationalising the event so heavily that it's unrecognisable from the original event, thus rendering it a fake news-item, or if a sponsored story originating in traditional news media is lacking a clear indicator that the content is in fact sponsored, and thus is believed to be true.

#### **2.5.4 News satire**

This type of content includes all attempts of news parody and satire, where news items are forged or twisted for humorous purposes, and sometimes for media- and societal criticism. Examples include online news outlets made to look like legitimate news sites, such as *theonion.com*, and satirical TV and radio shows that has current news as its centrepiece, such as *The Daily Show* on Comedy Central. News satire is not placed in the post-truth content category, even though one might argue that its intention is, in fact, to deceive. However, this study argues that satire, while indeed possibly deceiving, as evident by several accounts of news satire being believed to be real, doesn't have deceit as its main goal. Its creator ultimately wants to fool their audience into laughter, and while that is initially being done by making them believe they are reading a legitimate news report, they eventually want their audience to realise that news-item is fake, so they can start seeing the humour. The "punchline" lies in realising the news-item is fake. Additionally, sites carrying this type of content usually come with a disclaimer that items published on the site are indeed satire, and thus, the long-term intent to actually deceive can be considered low, and shouldn't be confused with the intent to fool for a short-term humorous confusion.

#### **2.5.5 Journalistic mistakes**

Finally, in the misleading mainstream content category, journalistic mistakes. This type of content concerns instances when something erroneous have ended up in traditional news reporting, such as sources that has turned out to carry false information or quoted experts that turned out to be incorrect, or simply such things as misinterpretations of ongoing events or even typos. The publishing of news satire, in belief that it's real, or eyewitness accounts and stories that turned out to be made-up are also included in this type of content. It is false information, but the intention to deceive, from the journalists point of view, can be expected to be low. These journalistic mistakes assume the shape of fake news when a mistake is published and other news outlets picks up the story before a correction has been made by the original paper, and then neglects to print this correction after it has been issued.

### **2.6 Three types of outlets**

These five types of content are published, visible and circulated in three main media outlets - *news-imposter outlets*, *ultra-partisan outlets*, and the *traditional news media*. Looking again at model 1, the size of the coloured, filled circles indicate a rough estimate of the likelihood that any specific type of content is originally published in that channel. Larger circle means higher likelihood. The



white, lined circles roughly indicate an estimate of the most likely proportional spread, or in other words, how the dissemination of the content is distributed across the different channels. Larger circle means higher proportion of distribution. Both circle sizes should be viewed as proportional only within the different types of content, and should thus not be compared across them. These estimates should not be taken as gospel, but rather as just that, rough estimates, based on the thorough examination of both content and discussion around the fake news concept that this study provides.

### **2.6.1 News-imposter outlets**

News-imposter outlets are websites or Facebook pages that are set up to resemble legitimate news outlets, and purports to be a legitimate producer or aggregator of news, but contain fake news items and other types of misleading content. There are two versions of this outlet. The first one is categorised as post-truth content, and publishes pure fake news, but also large amounts of misleading news and propaganda type of content. The sites and pages should be controlled by citizens, with a main goal of driving traffic and generating income. If they are controlled by a government or another group with a stated political goal, they should be classified as ultra partisan outlets (see below). The other version is categorised as mainstream content that publishes satire while set up to resemble legitimate news, such as [theonion.com](http://theonion.com).

### **2.6.2 Ultrapartisan outlets**

This channel consist of websites, blogs and social media accounts that are designed to spread information that has been curated, so to speak, to present news through a highly partisan, highly biased lens. They can be news-imposter outlets with a political goal, or simply opinion-pages with no intent of resembling a website. However, they are always cantered around relaying news items.

These pages and accounts usually centre around misleading news-type of content, as they often purport to be showing their audiences "the other side" of stories that are also being reported by the traditional media. Thus, material based on actual event takes precedence, but it's not uncommon for pure fake news items to be published and spread through this channel as well. This type of outlet's most salient goal is normally a political one, meaning they can both be important disseminators of propaganda, and even creators of propaganda. It also includes pages and accounts devoted to conspiracy theories, as well as the websites of highly partisan so called alternative media, i.e., news media that considers itself as "anti-establishment" and in opposition towards traditional news media, whom it considered only to be representing elite government and corporate interest. All these sites, pages and accounts are often discussed in traditional media and the public debate in conjunction with post-truth culture, and are often considered as mouthpieces for post-truth culture.

### **2.6.3 Traditional news media**

The final outlet is the traditional news media. This is the main channel for the type of misleading mainstream content labelled journalistic mistakes to have its origin. The channel also includes misleading news in the form sponsored content that hasn't been marked properly, and thus can be confused for a legitimate news item, as well as misleading news in the form of heavily biased

writing. It's also not completely uncommon for propaganda to originate in this channel, manifested for example as false information leaked to journalists who was led to believe it was from proper sources. Managing to originate, or at least to get spread, in this channel would be seen as very desirable for propagandists, seeing as they can then lend traditional news medias credibility to spread their message and further their objective. There's also been examples of satire being disseminated in this channel, under the belief that it is legitimate news. It should also be noted that many newspapers are still operating under a political beacon, and thus, might show bias even off-editorial space. If this bias becomes too protrusive, especially if fact checking starts to truckle, the content could be considered as misleading news originating from traditional news media channel.

### 3. Part II - Defending the boundaries

Now that we have a better grasp of the fake news concept, and reached a definition suitable for use in qualitative content analysis, we can move on to examine how journalists have discussed and related to this phenomena, from the perspective of boundary work. The chapter will start by taking a look at the literature on professional boundaries, and the act of defending these boundaries from non-professionals, i.e., boundary work. The next section will explore boundary work in journalism, which is based on the journalistic paradigm. Lastly, a short summary of operationalisations of boundary work in previous research will follow.

#### 3.1 Professional boundaries and boundary work

Professional boundaries concerns how members of occupations that are not protected titles create and/or maintain their role as a profession. Historically, a profession was identified as an occupation that was *"self-governing and embodied certain professional traits such as formal education, licensing, codes of ethics, relationships of trust between professional and client, a public-service imperative over commercial interest, social status, and so forth"* (Lewis, 2012, p.839). However, this structural approach was overtaken some decades ago by a more Weberian one, asking how occupations claim status and authority - what they do everyday to negotiate and maintain their self-proclaimed special position in society (ibid). Using attribution of selected characteristics for their specific field, an occupation striving towards professionalism seek the rights to attain authority and control in performing various social functions, or in other words, to perform a particular kind of work while excluding other groups from it. This power is gained as the profession comes to be relied upon by those excluded from it (Carlson, 2015). As famous sociologist Pierre Bourdieu noted: *"to exist in a field is to differentiate oneself"* (Fenton, 2009, p.91). Professional boundaries are not only symbolic, as having professional authority comes with material resources as well as cultural (Lewis, 2012; Carlson, 2015).

When outsiders try to step over the boundaries and get access to these resources, professions engage in boundary work (Gieryn, 1983). Most professions partake in this rhetorical exercise, but journalism is considered particularly engaged, because of its ever-evolving character and willingness to openly discuss such matters (Lewis, 2012). Thomas Gieryn however, who coined the term, used the field of science as an example, and specifically, the demarcation problem, i.e., how to distinguish science from information produced by humans that is non-science. His focus was to show how scientists used *"ideological efforts"* to distinguish themselves from non-scientists, and noted a common rhetorical style across branches of science that used *"attribution of selected characteristics to the institution of science (i.e., to its practitioners, methods, stock of knowledge, values and work organization) for purposes of constructing a social boundary that distinguishes some intellectual activities as "non-science"* (Gieryn, 1983 p. 872). He suggested that *"the public learn about 'science' through contrasts to 'non-science'"*, and identified three different occasions where boundary work would be a likely *"stylistic resource for ideologists of a profession or occupation"*: (1) when the goal is expansion of the current boundaries to include domains currently

claimed by other professions; (2) when the goal is monopolization of professional authority or resources, which is done through the expulsion of "rivals" from within by labelling them as "pseudo", "deviant" "amateur" etc; and finally, (3) when the goal is protection of autonomy over professional activities, this type of boundary work exempt members from within the profession from consequences of their work, by "*putting the blame on scapegoats from outside*" (p.791-792).

For journalism, an occupation lacking, in most countries including Sweden, formal professional barriers such as licensing or trade association membership to practice it (Lewis 2012, Carlson, 2015, Berkowitz, 2011), the professional boundaries are particularly important, and concerns *who* is a journalist, and *what* is considered good journalism. In other words, efforts to defend the authority of the journalistic field as the main information-producers of society. It consists of efforts to define and differentiate between professional journalism and its practices, and amateurs and non-journalists making claims onto parts of the domain of journalism. This is, and has always been, a hotly contested topic that can not be resolved by rallying behind an agreed-upon formal consensus or a functionalist set of parameters. Journalism is a constantly shifting concept and whatever is distinct about it must be continuously constructed by the practitioners (Carlson, 2015, Lewis, 2012). Where the line is drawn rests on various ethical principles, practices and promises (Carlson, 2015), commonly referred to as the *journalistic paradigm*.

### **3.2 The journalistic paradigm**

A paradigm is a concept developed by Thomas Kuhn (1970), which is defined as a set of "*broadly shared assumptions about how to gather and interpret information relevant to a particular sphere of activity*" (Bennet et. al., 1985, p. 54). Paradigms exist in most information-producing areas of society and helps people come to a general conclusion of what is and what is not a valid system of knowledge, and guides the group in organising and presenting this information. They can be formally written rules, but are more often an unspoken 'code of conduct', used to maintain authority over the practitioners field (Bennet et. al., 1985; Coddington, 2012). Paradigms and professional boundaries have a close relationship, meaning, one has to stay within a paradigm in order to be considered a respected member of a certain professional field (Perreault & Vos, 2016). The professional boundaries drawn by journalists for example, are based on the journalistic paradigm.

Bennet et. al., (1985), amongst others, argues that journalism, with its professionalized training, code of ethics and routinised practice, show many signs of being a paradigm-based field. Closely examined and observed throughout the years, the journalistic paradigm, in western democracies, has been shown to centre around an ideological view of what is acceptable journalism, and around a belief in a set of procedures that produces such journalism. The core value of this view is objectivity, and its close companions balance, distance, neutrality, and autonomy. It also includes an ethical mandate that sets boundaries for what is acceptable practice and quality control, such as source confidentiality and independent fact-checking (Berkowitz, 2000; Carlson, 2009; Berkowitz, 2011), as well a responsibility for both public service and immediacy (Lewis, 2012). The US largest and oldest organization representing journalists, the Society of Professional Journalists, has compiled a document outlining four principles agreed upon by its members as being the foundation

of ethical journalism, and encourages their use in its practice by all journalists regardless of media outlet. These four foundational principles are listed as follows: "(1) *Seek the truth and report it* - ethical journalism should be accurate and fair. Journalists should be honest and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information; (2) *Minimize harm* - ethical journalism treats sources, subjects, colleagues and members of the public as human beings deserving of respect; (3) *Act independently* - the highest and primary obligation of ethical journalism is to serve the public; and (4) *Be accountable and transparent* - ethical journalism means taking responsibility for one's work and explaining one's decisions to the public" (SPJ, 2014). Similarly, the Swedish Association of Journalists has published 17 guidelines labelled "the publicist rules" that are used beyond the constitutional laws of freedom of speech and freedom of the press. These are divided into five sections that are very similar to the ones presented by SPJ, namely: (1) *Provide accurate news*, (2) *be generous with responses* - which is explained to mean be accountable, (3) *respect personal integrity*, (4), *be careful using pictures*, (5) *listen to both sides*, and (6) *be careful when publishing names* (SJF, 2013).

Since there are no universal standards of truth against which one can measure information-producing practices, paradigms are evaluated against the second best thing: practical utility. People tend to agree with the underlying assumptions, and formal means of applying them, of a particular system of knowledge or representation once it reaches desirable values and goals. When this agreement is extended to a near universal faith in the validity of a system of representing and applying information, that system can be said to have acquired paradigmatic standing (Bennet et. al., 1985).

If one accepts the existence of such a news paradigm, and it's safe to say most of the western world indeed has, it will ultimately, like all paradigms, be confronted with the occasional 'troublemaker'. An anomalous case that exists partly within the logic of the paradigm, yet fail to conform to all defining characteristics of the paradigm. These anomalies threaten the paradigms status as norm by suggesting important properties of the real world is being left out of the paradigm, thus exposing limits and biases of the system of information gathering and presentation. Prior research show that when the paradigm is threatened in such ways, journalists, as previously mentioned, engage in boundary work - where they either dismiss the threat as diminutive or non-important, distance themselves from the threat and demonstrate how the existing paradigm is taking care of the problem, or refine the paradigm to absorb the threat (Carlson, 2015; Perreault & Vos, 2016; Berkowitz, 2011; Bennet et. al., 1985). If the anomalies become too troublesome to dismiss, the whole system might redefine to accommodate them - a paradigm shift. Such shifts are rare however, and tend to only occur after repeated, and failed, attempts to dismiss or repair the troublesome case (Kuhn, 1970; Bennet et. al., 1985). In journalism, these anomalies arises when news media is under criticism for committing ethical lapses or in other ways accused of not following the standards expected by objective professionals, or when new technologies or actors are trying to lay claim to areas within the journalistic domain. Boundary work is then used to normalise the situation and defend status quo, or to incorporate the new into the old paradigm (Bennet et. al., 1985, Hindman, 2005; Perreault & Vos, 2016). Criticism can come from at least three different

places: (1) from the journalistic field itself, as is often the case with 'misbehaving' journalistic actors, such as the previously mentioned Jayson Blair case; (2) from other social institutions, such as governments or interest groups reacting to questionable journalistic procedure such as the US governments criticism of journalist Helen Thomas', member of the white house press corps, comments on Jews and Israel (Hindman & Thomas, 2013); or (3) from the public, such as the blaming of news media for Princess Diana's death (Berkowitz, 2000). The public's possibilities to raise criticism was limited for a long time because of the lack of avenues to present their opinion. Sending a letter to the editor was pretty much the scope of it. However, due to the spread of internet and the rise of social media, new channels have opened up and the public is increasingly able to engage in criticism of the field of journalism (Perreault & Vos, 2016).

Boundary work and paradigm repair has commonly been used as two labels referring to the same thing (Carlson, 2015; Coddington, 2012), but also as two separate, but very similar, labels where paradigm repair implies efforts by those who base their work upon a paradigm to re-instil confidence in this set of unwritten rules used to define their professional practice, whereas boundary work implies an effort to adjust and adapt to changes by actors within the profession, or those outside of it who attempts to stake out their own turf within the profession (Berkowitz & Schwartz, 2016). Because the distinction between these two concepts are not fully understood and chiseled out yet, the former approach will be used, where paradigm repair is seen as a part of boundary work, and only the latter term, boundary work, will be used to describe the concept. However, to still be able to distinguish between when the boundary work is more focused on re-instilling confidence in the journalistic paradigm, rather than to adjust the boundaries for journalism/non-journalism, Berkowitz (2000) concept of "paradigm boosterism" will be used. Originally a theme unearthed from his study, he calls it a "twist" on the concept of boundary work, that has the purpose of demonstrating the superiority of the traditional news paradigm, or "glorify" it as he puts it (ibid, p. 141). This paradigm boosterism can be seen as an 'offensive' type of boundary work, where journalists actively advertise the superiority of the paradigm, whereas as more 'traditional' boundary work of drawing lines for who is professional and who is not, and explaining what went wrong in certain challenges of the paradigm could be seen as more of a 'defensive' strategy, where journalists are being more reactive, answering critics and threats to the paradigm and the profession as a whole.

This study argues that fake news, and post-truth culture as a whole, constitutes one of these threats/challenges/anomalous cases. Firstly, fake news, both in the pure form and in any of the other forms of post-truth content, is certainly created by actors trying to lay claim to a part of the journalistic domain, as they are producing texts that are supposed to look like they in fact comes from journalisms field of work, without having the professionalized training or authority to do so. Thus, by definition, they should be considered an anomaly that has stepped over the journalistic boundaries. Secondly, post-truth culture as a whole has, as previously noted, been directing a lot of criticism towards traditional news media, often viewed as a strategy to erode public trust of the media to better be able to advance ideas related to post-truth culture (Hirvonen, 2013, GT, 2017). These criticisms often include areas that relate to the journalistic paradigm, such as objectivity or

accusations that they are not telling the whole truth about certain topics (Virtanen, 2017a). A common rhetoric has been to paint the traditional media as being in one corner, defending one set of values by dishonest journalism, and an anti-establishment-movement, with their own "alternative media", being in the other corner, defending their set of values, and then the public can choose between which reality to believe (DN, 2017). Careful not to assume correlation to mean causation, the strategy seems to be working on the surface at least, as trust in traditional news media currently is at an all-time low in many western countries (Globescan, 2016), given there are most likely other reasons as well that all plays a part in this. All this amounts to a situation where journalists might be urged to do "traditional" boundary work to expel and distance themselves from the non-professional creators of fake news, as a way of reaffirming what is journalism and what is not, but also to "boost" the own paradigm to defend from post-culture criticism and repair the damage done by regaining the public's trust.

### **3.3 Boundary work in practice**

As previously mentioned, American sociologist Thomas Gieryn (1983) operationalised his concept of boundary work by identifying three techniques or types of boundary work used by academics to draw a line between science and non-science. These were labelled monopolization, expansion and protection of autonomy (see p. 27-28). As also noted, his conceptualisations can be fitted to match with other professions, such as journalism. Journalism scholar Matt Carlson (2015) not only provides a 'translation' of Gieryn's concepts to better match the field of journalism, but combines those concepts with "arenas" of journalism where boundary repair tend to occur, creating a matrix outlining the forms of boundary work most commonly seen in journalism. Starting with Gieryn's three genres 'translated' into in the context of news media, *monopolization* is first and foremost renamed *expulsion*, and concerns the battle to reposition something or someone as being outside of the acceptable realm of journalism. It acts as a "means of social control" in which borders are erected or strengthened and patrolled, with deviant actors being shunned, and is the most commonly studied type of boundary work in journalism (Carlson, 2015). A famous example is when New York Times writer Jayson Blair was found out, and fired, for fabricating and plagiarising stories, and the following responses and statements by his newspaper, and the journalistic community at large, had a focus on shunning Jayson Blair out of the realm of journalism as a 'wayward reporter' or 'bad apple', while reaffirming core norms and practices among 'the rest' of journalists (Hindman, 2005). Specific practices have also been on the receiving end of expulsion-based boundary repair, as evident by the denunciation of paparazzi-style photography after princess Diana's death (Berkowitz, 2000; Hindman, 2003). *Expansion* in a news media context concerns efforts to expand the border or the journalistic paradigm to include actors, practices or new medias that are either a brand new occurrence or were previously shunned or labelled as deviant. A common example includes the use of blogging as a journalistic tool, something that was at first looked upon with a frown from the journalistic community, but after some time got absorbed into journalistic practice. *Protection of autonomy* from a journalistic viewpoint concerns the tug of war over professional authority. While the previous two genres ultimately concerns what qualifies as journalism and who qualifies as a

journalist, protection of autonomy is where journalists make efforts to fend off incursions by non-journalists seeking to control or shape journalism, not as in acting as journalists - that would bring about expulsion techniques - but rather in trying to influence journalism through the use of power. For example, the practice can be seen in efforts by journalists to oppose advertisers from manipulating editorial content. Even though they might admit the value of certain non-professional actors, such as particular sources, walls between pro's and amateurs are both desired and maintained by journalists (Carlson, 2015).

Adding to these three types originated from Gieryn's work, Carlson (2015) goes on to create a matrix using the three areas of journalism where boundary repair most commonly occurs, *participants*, *practices* and *professionalism*. *Participants* involves all actors, both inside and outside of news work, relevant to the contestation of who is and who isn't a journalist. This can be anyone from actual journalists exposed of deviating actions, such as the case with Jayson Blair of the New York Times, to amateurs creating "citizen-journalism" or PR-agents trying to "spin" stories. If participants at its most basic concerns "who is appropriate?", *practices* then at its most basic concerns "what is appropriate?". It involves the contestations of what is acceptable methods for news gathering and distribution of news and information. Lastly, *professionalism* concerns journalists struggles form epistemic authority, that is, establishing journalism as distinct community with specialised knowledge, as well as defending the professional forms and values of traditional journalism (Carlson, 2015, p. 9-11).

Boundary/paradigm repair is most commonly practiced in opinion- and editorial pieces (Berkowitz 2000; Bennet et al. 1985; Hindman, 2003), i.e., texts given space by editors to provide opinion exchange and institutional stands on relevant issues (Hindman, 2003). Here, journalists and other key stakeholders, such as editors or publishers, have the opportunity to comment on the anomalous case, and exercise judgment and cast blame. They can explain to their audience who did wrong, why that is important, and how that troublesome occurrence wouldn't, and shouldn't, have been presented as news if the paradigm was followed and proper reporting was conducted (Bennet et. al., 1985; Berkowitz, 2000; Hindman & Thomas 2013).



## 4. Method

To explore how journalists worked to defend their status in times of post-truth culture, Altheide's (1987) approach to content analysis called ethnographic content analysis (ECA) will be used. The analysis will be conducted in two parts. First, after a general familiarisation with the texts, a protocol will be constructed, which will aid in finding instances of boundary work, and in the initial categorising of these texts by type of boundary work performed, and by the main participants the boundary work is centered around. These will be pre-determined categories based on previous research. In the second part, these initial results will be analysed for common patterns and themes. Additional analysis of these themes, incorporating the theoretical framework of boundary work and fake news-definition, will allow for the study's second research question to be answered.

The chapter begins with a short introduction to ECA, followed by an outline of the design of the study in form of selection choices and data collection, a presentation of the protocol used to initially guide the analysis, and a look at how the process of constant comparison and discovery associated with ECA took shape. The chapter ends with a short word on validity.

### 4.1 Ethnographic Content Analysis

ECA moves in the same circles as the more traditional quantitative content analysis (QCA). QCA stems from positivistic assumptions of objectivity and provides a method of "*obtaining data to measure the frequency and variety of messages*" (Altheide, 1987 p. 66) and is most commonly used to verify or confirm hypothesized relationships. Focusing on validity through reliability and replication, the protocol is the main instrument, as the researcher selects and analyzes data according to explicit and consistently applied rules. In communication research, it's often used to explore message characteristics (Altheide, 1987; Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

The ECA approach on the other hand eschews some of the rigour of traditional QCA, for a focus instead on reflexivity. Whereas QCA has a serial, stepwise progression from concept development to data collection to analysis and interpretation, ECA is more circular, consisting of reflexive movements between all these steps, with a goal of being systematic and analytic, but not rigid. It is focused on discovery, confirmation or extension of theoretical claims, as well as on the discovery of meaning in cultural activities (Hansen, 2013). It is thus a fitting tool for discovery of boundary work in texts, as well as to for getting a deeper understanding of that boundary work, as it will aid in the discovery and confirmation of the theoretical claim that journalists use boundary work when challenged, and also in finding themes and common patterns that show, within this boundary work, how journalists have defended their borders.

Initially, the study is guided by theoretically relevant categories but others are expected, and allowed, to emerge during the course of the study, in contrast to the more deductive approach of QCA (Altheide, 1996; Hindman, 2003). This fits well with this study as research on the modern fake news concept is scarce, and thus it's hard to predict exactly what frames or categories that might present itself upon closer examination. The method follows several steps which starts with a research problem, and an exploratory phase of familiarizing with a smaller sample of the texts. A protocol is then created based on these initial texts, in connection with the theoretical framework of

the study, which is then tested on a smaller sample of the texts. The sample is then expanded to incorporate more of the texts, testing the validity of the protocol. Finally, there is a refinement process where the researcher rotates between bringing in more texts to the sample and modifying the protocol to reflect the emergent data (Altheide, 1996). This type of data collection based on a theoretically guided protocol but combined with ethnographic "field notes" supports a theoretically informed account of media content, while not hiding critical question and issues that might become apparent later, as is often the case with structured protocols used alone (Altheide, 1987 p.94).

## **4.2 Selection choices and data collection**

Previous research on boundary work concerning journalism suggests that the practice is mainly carried out through newspapers opinion- and editorial sections (Berkowitz 2000; Bennet et al. 1985; Hindman, 2003). Newspaper journalists, especially those of larger, national papers, are considered as having internalized the journalistic paradigm the strongest amongst all types of journalists, and the op-ed space is considered as the "*official viewpoint of an individual newspaper*" and its "*institutional voice*" (Bennet et al. 1985, Hindman, 2003, p. 671) and as such, likely the space where a newspaper's "official" definition of, and defence tactic against, the fake news concept will be presented. This provides a theoretically apt opportunity to also make the data more manageable, as the scope of texts examined can be reasonably limited to larger, national newspapers. However, regarding editorials, it quickly became clear during the early, information gathering-stages of this study that boundary work was being performed in regular news sections of papers as well. In particular, longer exposés of the origins of fake news made clear distinctions between journalistic and non-journalistic practices (eg., Mosesson, 2017). Thus, both editorial content and regular news items will be examined. However, no actual published fake news-stories will be examined, other than through being referenced in the 'meta-texts' analysed. It is important to note at this stage that the purpose of this research is not to investigate whether or not a certain news item labelled 'fake' by the news press was in fact true or not. Nor is it to examine if these publications have published any fake news-articles in belief that it was true. Rather, the study concerns "the texts about the texts", i.e., when these publications write about fake news as a concept. Also, only texts by journalists and/or relevant newspaper management, such as editors, publishers etc., were included, as the purpose of the paper is to study how the journalistic field is approaching fake news. Opinion-pieces undersigned by actors working outside the news-media, such as businessmen, interest groups etc. were read for context, but not included in the analysis.

Sweden was chosen as country of study, a choice that has several advantages beyond the obvious linguistic and accessibility ones. Firstly, Sweden is considered to be an 'archetype' of a media system with a strong professionalisation of journalists, meaning that Swedish journalists display high levels of autonomy from state-, management- and business actors, distinct professional norms and ethical rules, and a strong orientation towards an ethic of public service, rather than towards interests of individuals (Hallin & Manicni, 2004). It is therefore reasonable to suggest that the journalistic paradigm stands very strong among Swedish journalists, who will then most likely feel a strong need to defend this paradigm as it is challenged by fake news and post-truth culture.

Secondly, Sweden has found itself somewhat at the centre of a lot of the current discussion around fake news, as many of the fake news-items in circulation during the timeframe of this study claimed to reflect events that supposedly had happened in Sweden (e.g. Moreno, 2017; Mosesson, 2017). Additionally, The Swedish civil contingencies agency has issued a public warning for the effects fake news might have on Swedish democracy, and the Swedish prime minister have publicly reiterated this warning and suggested measures should be taken to minimize the harm done (Löfvén, 2017; Göteborgs Posten, 2017). Thus, the concept has been very much in public debate, and journalists have had no choice but to relate and respond to the debate, and therefore, there will be no shortage of empirical material to examine. The time period chosen for examination was from December 1st, 2016 to March 31st, 2017, enough time to include three events that has hitherto led to the largest spikes in google searches on the term fake news: pizzagate, Donald Trumps inauguration as US president and the press conference where he accused CNN's Jim Acosta of being fake news (Google, 2017), while also keeping the data at a manageable size.

Data for the analysis was collected using the Gothenburg University Library media archive Retriever, with the option "storstadspress" [literally "big city press"] selected to only include the largest Swedish national newspapers, which are all based in metropolitan regions (TS-Mediefakta, 2017) and include: tabloids Aftonbladet and Expressen, their sister papers Göteborgs-Tidningen (GT) and Kvällsposten, daily- and morning papers Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet, Dagens Industri, Göteborgs-Posten (GP), Sydsvenskan, and finally ad-supported free paper Metro. Search terms used where the English term "fake news", the literal Swedish translation "falska nyheter", and the Swedish-English variant "fejknheter", as well as the English term "post-truth" and its Swedish translation "postsanning". Both plural and singular forms of the terms where used where grammatically applicable. Evidence that the fake news concept and post-truth culture are often discussed together could be drawn from the fact that after first going through all results of the search terms relating to fake news, only 4 additional relevant texts were found when using search terms related to post-truth that hadn't already been accounted for. Additional related search terms were also tried, including both Swedish and English spellings of the words "mis"- and "disinformation", as well as different Swedish synonyms for "fake" in relation to the word for "news", such as "låtsasnyheter" and "bluffnyheter". However, these related terms generally didn't offer many hits that included evidence of boundary work, and those that did were already accounted for by one or several of the aforementioned terms. Thus, fake news and post-truth in both Swedish and English were terms considered as providing acceptable theoretical saturation, and consequently used for the sampling of texts.

### **4.3 The protocol**

To assist the empirical analysis, and to find and categorize any boundary work performed, a research protocol was created as a way of operationalising boundary work in relation to the challenge presented by the modern fake news concept. The protocol will be used as a way to find and make an early categorization of the data, that will then be examined more closely to unearth themes and the core meanings of the texts (Hindman, 2005). Based on the literature accounted for in

earlier chapters, and mainly on Carlson's (2015, p.10) matrix of types of boundary work in journalism, the theoretical frame suggests that when faced with challenges towards the journalistic paradigm, traditional news media will either conclude that current journalistic routines are inadequate ways of providing the public with information, and thus attempt to redefine the professional boundaries and the journalistic paradigm to include the challenging entity, i.e., *expansion*; or they will conclude that current journalistic routines are in fact adequate, and that whatever is challenging the paradigm is rather an anomaly that should not exist had the creators adhered to 'proper journalism', i.e., *expulsion* (Carlson, 2015, Hindman, 2005). Considering the broad challenge that the modern fake news concept presents to the journalistic paradigm, and how it challenges important core values of the paradigm such as truthfulness and objectivity, boundary work in the form of expansion, as it is defined by Carlson, was expected to be at a minimum. It's simply not reasonable that the journalistic field would embrace falsified or fabricated news items as a legitimate journalistic practice when it eschews so many and so important parts of the news paradigm. However, a sort of "expansion light"-strategy might still be found in the texts, described by Hindman (2005) as an type of boundary work where journalists acknowledge the limitations of the journalistic paradigm but "consequently admit that their methods and definitions are not reliable but continue to use them." Expulsion-based boundary work was expected to be plentiful, again because of the stark contrast in falsified news and journalistic ethical norms. Expulsion has also been the by far most prevalent type found in several comparable studies (eg. Carlson, 2015; Berkowitz, 2000; Hindman 2003 & 2005; Perreault & Vos, 2016). Additionally, Carlson's (2005) third type of boundary work, *protection of autonomy*, will also be used in the analysis scheme to locate instances of boundary work. In Carlson's model, it's presented as attempts by journalists to fend off meddling non-journalistic informational actors, such as PR-agents, or to keep management or advertisers away from editorial control (ibid, p.12). However, with the study's topic in mind, this type will be interpreted as instances when journalists defend against actors, most likely within post-truth culture, that might be perceived as interfering with the journalists ability to define and execute their work, such as attempts to label traditional media as untrustworthy or in other ways undermine their credibility towards the public.

All three types of boundary work are expected to be carried out in three different arenas, connecting to either participants, practices or professionalism. Participants regards the deviant actors that are then either expelled, protected against, or welcomed in to an expanded paradigm. These could be other journalists, political figures, celebrities etc. Practices, reasonably enough, regards deviant practices that boundary work is used against. These can include perceived inferior ways of information gathering, new technologies that are either expelled or incorporated etc. Professionalism regards the ethical values and skills that are not considered as up to par with those of the journalistic paradigm, as well as the right to be considered as professionals, without unqualified actors performing or meddling with journalistic duties.

As noted in the literature overview (see p.30), some scholars have used a perspective when boundary work and paradigm repair are two separate, but similar, practices, a divide that makes it possible to distinguish between "offensive" boundary work, i.e., attempts to re-instil confidence in

the journalistic paradigm, and "defensive" boundary work, i.e, efforts by actors within journalism to adjust and adapt to changes by actors outside of the profession. As this study assumes the two concepts as one, to still be able to make this distinction, the concept termed by Berkowitz (2000) as "paradigm boosterism" will be used to label those instances of boundary work that aims to demonstrate the superiority of the traditional news paradigm rather than defend it from threats. Paradigm boosterism will be considered as "offensive" boundary work, where journalists work proactively in a way, drumming up the importance of the paradigm, and boundary work that is conducted in more of a responsive manner will be considered as "defensive" boundary work.

#### 4.4 The process

Putting all of these ideas into practice, the search terms were entered at the Gothenburg University Library media archive, which resulted in a total number of 548 articles that mentioned fake news in any of the ways stipulated above during the allotted timeframe.

Following the ideas of ECA these articles and editorials were read through the lens of the research protocol and marked when contained phrases, passages and wordings that indicated expulsion, expansion or protection of autonomy-type boundary work, as previously operationalized. For instance, this sentence was considered a clear manifestation of boundary work in the form of expulsion: "*But then, it's not real journalism that Horowitz is engaging in, it's fake news.*" (Nordlund. 2017). The author is clearly expelling the deviant actor, in this case an american filmmaker, from the realm of "real journalism", i.e, journalism that follows the journalistic paradigm, here by using the fake news-moniker to instead place the actor in a realm of fakes and lies. Whereas the following sentence is an example of what was considered a manifestation of protection of autonomy - in a text scapegoating Facebook and how it present news to its users for the heavy influx off disinformation in todays society, the author points out that traditional journalism has trained experts for this kind of job, and not algorithms based on profit: "*Before social media became a source for news, media institutions and newspapers filtered what news that were shown. But while the employees there was trained in source criticism, it's now up to each user to filter on their own. [...] Facebook can basically do what they want but can't be regulated.*" (Jones, 2016)

Again following the ideas of ECA, a smaller amount of texts, around 20, that stood out during the initial reading as clear examples of boundary work were selected for the initial exploratory phase. This sub-sample of texts were then read more closely, and the "full" research protocol was incorporated, noting where the different types of boundary work took place in regards to what Carlson (2015) called "arenas", i.e., whether the boundary work focused on participants, practices or professionalism. Already in this first general reading, there was a clear pattern emerging in the arena of participants, where a smaller, concentrated set of actors could be found as the centre of discussion in a large majority of the texts, such as creators of fake news-items and social media giant Facebook. Thus, a step back to the protocol was taken, as slight adjustments were made to include "main participants" of the texts as an important variable to be noted around each text.

Practices and professionalism was noted about each text, but not categorized in any way as no clear common themes were found around them.

Next step was back to the texts with the adjusted protocol. As the sub-sample of texts was expanded little by little, a common pattern of journalists acknowledging some of the criticism from post-truth culture was evident, but where a "full" expansion, i.e., inclusion into the journalistic paradigm, was never going to happen, another step back to the protocol was taken and "expansion-light" was added as a third type of boundary work, together with expulsion and protection of autonomy.

As the protocol now provided a satisfactory aid in getting a feel for the smaller sub-sample, the sample of texts was expanded until all 548 texts that mentioned the search terms were accounted for. The protocol needed no more intervention, as the three types of boundary work together with categorization of the main participants seemed to give a good reflection of the emergent data, as some distinct, clear patterns evolved during this refinement process. As duplicates and texts including no apparent boundary work was discarded during this process, 88 texts that mentioned fake news and included some sort of boundary work, according to the study's research protocol, was chosen for further study.

These 88 texts were read again in close detail with notes taken as recurring patterns occurred around which the fake news concept was discussed and boundary work was performed. As the group of main participants subsequently became isolated and more defined, the different themes became more protruded around a few sub-groups, as a specific set of actors were essentially always brought up by the different journalists when discussing particular topics. For example, a great deal of texts that included the protection of autonomy type of boundary work had either Facebook, Google or media consumers as its main participant. In nearly all of these, there was some kind of argumentation that these actors are to blame for the rise of misleading information, because they interfere with the work of 'proper' journalism by enabling and performing the dissemination of fake news content and by giving equal weight, via algorithms in the case of tech companies and information valuation by the media consumers, to traditional news media vis-à-vis news-imposter sites and ultrapartisan outlets. These texts shared other common patterns such as being defensive, and using a somewhat elitist tone, to borrow a phrase commonly used by members of post-truth culture, and was eventually grouped together as a theme named directing criticism. In total, four different themes were identified: (1) *Fake news creators as deviant journalistic actors*, where focus is on expulsion creators of fake news-items; (2) *Directing criticism*, which is described above; (3) *Reclaiming the definition*, where focus is on post-truth culture's, and Donald Trump in particulars, use of the term fake news to describe traditional media outlets; and (4) *Traditional journalism as the saviour of democracy*, where focus is on how post-truth culture is harmful to western democratic values, and asserting the journalistic paradigms status as a vital part of a free, open, democratic society. These themes will be explored in more detail in the results and conclusion chapters, and will also form the answer to the second research question.

As these themes were fine-tuned and placement of the articles were made sure to accurately present the context of the theoretical framework, portions that most clearly and descriptively

expressed the respective themes, most preferably so in connection to the fake news concept were selected. These will also be presented in the coming chapter as illustrative examples of each theme.

#### **4.5 Validity**

For a study to hold good scientific quality, it must sustain scrutiny of peers based in scientific rules and methods. The interpretive nature of content analysis tend to cast some doubts about its replicability, especially with regards to more inductive approaches where the researcher plays a big part, such as ECA. For example, the reflexive nature of the protocol in ECA makes it difficult to deploy a second coder for reasons of inter-coder reliability, a common strategy in other methods of content analysis (Hansen, 2013). With more time and resources, it might have been possible to bring in an additional coder for the final stages of reading though, after the protocol was deemed as complete. However, the study's firm grounding in previous, robust, boundary work-research results in detailed operationalizations that are close to the theoretical perspectives of the literature. Expulsion, expansion and protection of autonomy are all well-established techniques of boundary work that has been observed plentiful since they were coined by Gieryn in 1983, and many of these within the field of journalism (eg. Carlson, 2015; Berkowitz & Schwartz, 2015; Coddington, 2012), and thus reliable measurements/indicators of boundary work in journalism. Seeing as boundary work is routinely used to understand the logic of the journalistic paradigm, how it is defended and how it develops in relation to different threats, and also used to gauge the future of news, (Lewis, 2012, Carlson, 2015), these operationalizations assure that the theoretical frame of the study is covering relevant aspects to answer the second research question. This, as well as the transparent nature of the study, making it possible to still gain validity through replication, adds to the overall robustness of the study, despite the small doubts mentioned above.

## 5. Results

This chapter explores the empirical material described in the previous chapter, and presents detailed overviews of four themes around which boundary work regarding the fake news concept was discussed. In total, 548 texts by journalists from December 1st 2016 to March 31st 2017, published in the 10 largest daily newspapers in Sweden were considered, 88 of them indicated use of boundary work, and was thus chosen for further examination.

Firstly however, the fact that boundary work was even found in the texts deserves to be noted, as this means that the study's premise that fake news and post-truth culture constitutes a threat to the journalistic paradigm worthy of defending. It also means this thesis does not need to come to a crestfallen premature ending - a sigh of relief was indeed expelled when that realisation occurred. As such, the second research question can now be explored - how, in the light of fake news and post-truth culture, do journalists work to defend their status as society's only legitimate producers and presenters of true and fair information? To answer this, we move on to the data, and explore the types of boundary work that was performed, and around what themes that boundary work was performed.

The most common type of boundary work found was, in line with previous research, expulsion. This was followed by protection of autonomy, and there were no cases of expansion if the full definition is used, but was found in a few texts when adjusted as "expansion-light" as described in section 4.4 of the previous chapter.

As also mentioned in the previous chapter, this boundary work was carried out within four themes; (1) *Fake news creators as deviant journalistic actors*, where creators of fake news items are expelled from the journalistic paradigm; (2) *Directing criticism*, where blame for the rise of fake news is placed; (3) *Reclaiming the definition*, where focus is on how the term fake news has been 'appropriated' by post-truth culture and used to describe traditional media outlets; and (4) *Traditional journalism as the saviour of democracy*, a theme that ultimately sets out to defend and reaffirm the importance of traditional journalism as an invaluable institution for a healthy, liberal democracy.

Found across all types of boundary work, and all four themes, but most prominent in the first and last following the listing above, was paradigm boosterism. It could be found in basic promotion of the journalistic paradigm, where journalists simply reaffirm and acknowledge positive traits about the paradigm, for example when Thomas Mattson, publisher at Expressen, gave a local journalists a pat on the back for winning an award for investigative journalism "*In these times of crises for the local newspapers, where the global media-climate is poisoned by fact resistance and fake news, VK kept producing quality journalism*" (Mattson, 2017b). It could as well be found in the many instances where the participants, practices and professionalism of creators of post-truth content was juxtaposed with the practices and professionalism of traditional journalists, as well as when the journalistic paradigm is held up as a bearing beam for democracy, which will crumble if the journalistic paradigm is erased. It should be noted however that the boundary work was not purely offensive, as there was some instances where a more defensive approach was taken. These



instances mainly occurred around the themes "directing criticism" and "reclaiming the definition", and was usually carried out through "expansion-light"-type of boundary work, where some criticism against the journalistic paradigm was deemed as valid, but the paradigm is kept at status quo.

### **5.1 Fake news creators as deviant journalistic actors**

The first theme was most commonly found around expulsion-type boundary work, and centred around articles and editorials discussing the creators of fake news and other post-truth content. The main participants includes creators, or heavy disseminators, of mostly pure fake news (see model 1 on p. 20) type of content, and their practices and professional values, who was rejected and expelled from the journalistic paradigm, while audiences were simultaneously reminded of the compared quality of journalism produced within that paradigm.

Clear examples of this theme took place in longer investigative articles where creators of pure fake news content and individuals who runs news imposter-websites were exposed, described and interviewed, and the discussion that followed these articles on editorial space. In fact, these longer exposés of fake news creators, and the editorials discussing their practices and values in relation to those of traditional journalists, worked in symbiosis to present the content creators as far from 'proper' journalists as possible. In these texts, expulsion was apparent in connection to both participants, practices and professionalism by the, both explicit and implicit, depictions of the people behind pure fake news content, their practices and values as deviant from the journalistic paradigm.

In one such exposé, Dagens Nyheter sent an investigative reporter to Macedonia to make a feature story of one of the many young men in that area who creates pure fake news content and runs their own news-imposter websites out of their homes. The exposé presents him, and his friends who also runs websites, as poor, young, somewhat computer-savvy men, whose long tussles with unemployment has left them with unscrupulous feelings about deceiving thousands of people, and clearly describes how their practices are not exactly those of a professional group of journalists:

*"- It's so easy, says the guy with the moustache. You don't even have to care how the page looks, just start throwing things up. Some of the people who do this can barely speak English, the only thing you need to know is how to copy and paste". (Mosesson, 2017)*

It also presents the fake news creators professional values as inferior to that of the journalistic paradigm, expelling them by using quotes where they confess that their articles are mostly fiction, and that brings to light how they're only doing this for monetary reasons - not to serve the public with objective information - and also to present them as young kids just messing around and making money - not as serious journalists bound to ethical norms:

*"- Sometimes you can't believe people are buying this, laughs Slagan. Obama joining IS and that. Really stupid stuff. But people click on it. - We make good*

*money lying, says his friend in the fur collar. I don't care about Donald Trump, Hillary, or any politician. I just want to make some money. They both laugh and pick up their backpacks. - We make more money than the grown-ups now!"* (Mosesson, 2017).

Similar quotes can be found in other interviews with fake news-creators:

*"- Sure the information is bad, false and misleading. But the logic is that if it gets people to click and interact, then let's go, said a student in Velez"* (Nevéus, 2016).

*"-I marvel over the readers response, how absurd the articles may be, there are still a great deal who believe that it's real"* (Delling, 2016)

The DN exposé was followed up on the same day by an op-ed from another journalist who stated that since the original mission for journalism is to *"as truthfully as possible convey what's relevant in our time"*, what the investigative reporter did in Macedonia was *"nothing strange really, just journalism"*, putting an emphasis on how the DN exposé was proper journalism, whereas what the Macedonian interviewee's did, created fake news, was not. (Hanson, 2017). Another day after, another editorial followed where the paper's cultural editor boosted the journalistic paradigm by concluding that the exposé was proof that *"the classic combination of good sources and free journalism is standing strong even in the age of 'trumpism' [a term used synonymously with post-truth throughout the text]"* (Wiman, 2017a). This way of juxtaposing the practices of traditional news media to those of fake news-creators, as a way of presenting the traditional news paradigm in a better light, and to distance themselves from the 'bad' side of the boundary, was common. Cultural editor for Sydsvenskan Rakel Chukri used this technique and, as in the DN exposé, also used wordings that diminishes the fake news-creator to a disobedient child:

*"For serious media, source criticism is a part of the daily routines. The journalists' credibility depends on correcting incorrect information - and that the readers know where to direct feedback. But how do you deal with fake news coming out of troll-factories? [...] To whom should the readers turn in this case? [The creator]'s mother who can grab him by the ear?"* (Chukri, 2017)

Similarly, SvD interviewed a Swedish man who owned a news imposter-website who stated that he created the site as a source of income, but claimed to be doing it as satire, and as a way to raise awareness about source criticism in society. Again, quotes are included where he marvels that some of his audience actually believes him (Delling, 2016). That pure fake news of this sort is a kind of media critique later got dismissed by the political chief editor of Aftonbladet, who was clearly

expelling both the practices and professional values of these fake news-creators from the journalistic profession when she stated that

*”No, this is not about media critique. These are websites that exists first and foremost to undermine trust in traditional media, and secondly to disseminate very specific lies. They have no ambition to be objective, describe the world as it really is, or find their way to the truth” (Pettersson, 2017).*

Expulsion connected to the professional values of fake news creators in this way was occasionally used on its own as well, commonly as another way of boosting the paradigm. In a op-ed focusing on how the Swedish far-right party Sweden Democrats (SD) have brought the 'party-press' back in relation to their connections with several ultrapartisan outlets, cultural editor at Expressen Karin Olsson noted the differences in professional and moral values between traditional journalists and creators of fake news, and post-truth content in general, and wrote:

*[Sweden] has for a long time been used to a professionalized coverage, where all the big established media work according to roughly the same principle of press ethics and news valuation. [...] The time when political bureaucrats at some newsrooms would filter reality is long gone. However, it should be said that the major media outlets are working on the basis of broadly speaking liberal standpoints, such as the fact that gender equality is something desirable and homosexuality is as "good" as heterosexuality. The "alternative" media outlets online however, are reporting with, mildly speaking, another set of values in front of them. The blazing xenophobia forms a basis, but there are also other issues. Its's hard to know how big their market is, but the readership is in any case deeply committed (Olsson, 2017).*

In another article, one that we'll come back to, DN reporter Martin Jönsson interviews the editor-in-chief of the New York Times about the current media climate, who goes on to very explicitly expel the writers of alternative media as non-journalists:

*”- When we're placed in one corner of the ring, and Breitbart, Infowars and other sites in the other corner, they have created an image of us being the opposition, and that it's all about opinion, when it fundamentally needs to be about facts. If you are a journalist, you are doing a commendable work to get the truth out, it's your mission. We are journalists, Breitbart and others are not.”*  
(Jönsson, 2017b)

Linda Nordlund of Svenska Dagbladet also used expulsion on so called "alternative journalists", when she wrote about an american filmmaker named Ami Horowitz, and a short Youtube-

documentary he made about multiculturalism in Sweden. This clip was aired by US TV-network Fox News, prompting president Trump to, during a speech, mention Sweden and allude to some sort of event, connected to terror, that supposedly had happened "last night" before the speech, but in reality never happened at all. This documentary clip was heavily criticised by Swedish journalists, politicians and those appearing in the clip (Nordlund, 2017). Nordlund's text sets out to disprove some of the supposed facts presented by Horowitz, and also includes a very clear expulsion of him from the field of journalism:

*"Horowitz shows the waiting room at Solna police station, says to be surprised that the majority of people waiting are female, and cites an anonymous source: 'most are there to report a rape'. Those of us who has been to the police station in question knows that the longest lines are always to the passport expedition. But then, it's not real journalism that Horowitz is engaging in, it's fake news. The Swedish police officers interviewed by Horowitz has publicly stated a retraction: 'He's edited those answers together. We're answering totally different questions in the real interview'."*

(Nordlund, 2017)

## **5.2 Directing criticism**

The second theme saw media consumers and internet-companies, mainly Facebook and Google, as its main participants. It was found in both expulsion-based boundary work, and perhaps even more so in protection of autonomy-type of work. Within this theme, journalists argued that the main participants of the theme interfere with 'proper' journalism by enabling and performing dissemination of fake news-content and giving equal weight and exposure to news items from traditional media outlets versus those from news-imposter and ultrapartisan outlets. This new media landscape, without publishers and other intermediary branches of self-control, and inadequate source criticism by media consumers, was both expelled as a poor way of distributing news information, and defended as a threat to the journalistic autonomy of defining news value and "setting the agenda". While the previous theme included plenty of instances of "paradigm boosterism", texts within this theme adopted a less "promotional" stance, instead opting for a view that can be understood as "expansion light", where journalists admit that the some of the post-truth criticism against them are valid, but they will still defend status quo of the journalistic paradigm.

As mentioned, the main participants this theme is grouped around are media consumers, Facebook and Google. While the two latter companies were blamed for enabling and funding dissemination of fake news, media consumers were criticised for not being able to separate between 'proper' journalism and post-truth content, and not managing to step out of Facebook-"filter bubbles". Often with a small caveat that traditional news media is not perfect and will eventually make mistakes, journalists doing boundary work within this theme expressed a view that it's not them, but the main participants within the theme, who are to blame for the influx of misleading information into the

information ecosystem, and are thus sitting on all the tools to help "clean it up". For example, while lamenting the many false stories disseminated on social media during the US election, and pointing out that 'genuine journalists' does not make up news out of nothing, SvD's US-correspondent Erik Bergin writes:

*"Many readers seem to rely more on what pops up in their opinion- and 'like'-guided newsfeeds on Facebook rather than what's in the paper. What we're risking here are parallel realities, where both are perceived as equally true by those who sympathise/fertilised with what is claimed, but where only one of them is built on concrete facts."*

He goes on to argue that the heavy bias in US cable-TV news is probably a strong contributing factor that has fertilised the soil for post-truth content to spread, as well as the technology behind Facebook's news valuation, where algorithms decide what news are most salient to an individual based on the users previous "likes" and online engagement, instead of professional editors. However, the main chunk of accountability, as well as the responsibility to restore order in the information ecosystem, is laid on the media consumers:

*"So what's the solution? Media consumers needs to learn the difference between opinion and fact, and understand the meaning of at least basic source criticism. That Facebook is giving it's users the ability to flag obvious fabrications of news is good, but it doesn't solve the root of the problem. Because only if readers, TV-viewers and Facebook-users dares to challenge themselves with opinions and facts that goes against the own perception can disinformation be fought." (Bergin, 2017)*

Similarly in an unbylined editorial in GT, focused on explaining how fake news is nothing new, the authors concludes that it's all up to each and every consumer to be critical of sources, and expels post-truth culture as something that society need to get rid of immediately:

*"At the end of the day, it's up to each individual to use be critical of sources - and self-critical, keep their heads cool even when a news item or web-rumour confirms ones worldview. Schools need to learn students critical thinking and source criticism. Postmodern contempt for fact, denial of objectivity and of upgrading the own mind needs to be scrapped asap" (GT, 2017).*

From Martin Jönssons interview with New York Times editor-in-chief in DN comes another quote suggesting that the journalistic paradigm has always been on the right course, it's society that has changed:

*"We're now facing a new type of digital competition, with sites who make up stories and purposely spread lies - and who has the ear of the president. For us, the truth, and the pursuit of it, has always been number one, there, nothing has changed. But the outside world has changed."*  
(Jönsson, 2017b)

Audiences getting used to not paying for journalism is also questioned, as Karin Säfström of Kvällsposten senses a spoiled double-standard in the wake of all the misleading information in today's society:

*"In the middle of it all, it's pretty amazing that people now want traditional media to expose the fake news. A paradox, one might say, that we're suddenly supposed to convey what DIDN'T happen, and what is NOT true, instead of the other way around. Of course, we need to pick up that ball and strengthen the educative side of journalism that was present in its early days. But then, people need to use the traditional media, and be prepared to pay for journalism"* (Säfström, 2017)

Back in SvD, we find boundary work more narrowly directed at Facebook, as editor-in-chief Fredric Karén has his focus on the lack of publishers and editorial control of the social media site's news-feed, something that is in sharp contrast to the way news should be properly handled, selected and presented, according to the paradigm:

*"If one wants to begin to unravel why trust in established media is sinking, right there is probably a good place to start: the Facebook news feed. Where serious news are mixed with false, where no requirements for ethics exist, where no long-term consideration is taken towards individuals who are exposed. Where no publisher can be held accountable"*

He continues by quoting Swedish Press Ombudsman Ola Sigvardsson, confirming that there is a strong tradition of journalistic professionalism in Sweden that is now in jeopardy because of how Facebook deals with publishing, placing it firmly upon the internet giants to correct the situation and give back the autonomy of news valuation and agenda setting to the traditional media:

*"- 'There's a strong awareness about the importance of ethical questions among Swedish journalists and publishers', [Ola Sigvardsson] says to TT. Facebook and Google speaks highly of the importance of serious, investigative journalism and arrange conferences and start funds. But it's only when they get to grips with the real heart of the matter that they can make a difference. Stop linking to them, stop help them make money, shut down their YouTube-channels. Then they would make journalism a real service"* (Karén, 2017).

Another illustrative example of boundary work that's asserting accountability to social media-companies, mainly Facebook, could be found in Richard Swartz of DN's op-ed "*With the appreciation of Humpty Dumpty*" from January 14th. Likening the anarchic dissemination of information on the internet with the heavy influx of mis- and disinformation that spread with the introduction of other new information technologies, mainly the printing press and radio, he is highly critical of the general lack of editorial control on the internet, and of the way citizens views of such instances have changed - clearly drawing up a boundary between amateurs and professionals:

*"[On the internet], it's facts who suffer: author or source is often missing, the speed makes it difficult to handle the information critically. When it comes to online news services, there is often no editorial board, that is, the collective intermediary whose main occupation is the control and selection of facts. But in today's amateurish 'do it yourself'-spirit, editorial control is perceived rather as a censorship agency - if one is truly free and independent, one puts together ones own image of the world, in time increasingly restricted by ones own interests and ignorance. Curious really".*

To emphasize the point about the difference editorial control makes in professional versus amateur journalism, he ends the text with a clever analogy to chef's at a restaurant:

*"Sure, occasionally we all open a can of tomato soup in the kitchen that we scoop up while standing, but that is not the same thing as going to a five-star restaurant and choose from a menu put together by professional chefs. A proficient editorial board is [the chefs'] counterpart, providing not lobster soup, but carefully selected facts, seasoned with a pinch of opinion. Against false and fraudulent news, only knowledge is helping." (Swartz, 2017)*

In fact, several texts were similarly aimed at, or included passages that were aimed at, social media giant Facebook and its role as news publisher. This is a role the company itself has refuted, stating that they are nothing more than a technology company. It should be noted however that during the writing of this paper, Facebook has both launched an option to flag suspiciously fake news-stories, as well of adjusting their algorithm of news value, thus responding to some of the criticism brought up by this theme (Jurjaks, 2017). Clearly though, journalists seem to disagree and feels like Facebook is more than a tech company. The boundary work regarding this topic could be seen as an example of the protection of autonomy-type. Facebook is, according to traditional journalists, doing traditional media institutions job of selecting and highlighting news, something they lack training and ability to do correctly, compared to the intermediary branches tasked with this responsibility in traditional journalistic routine, mainly editors and publishers. Thus journalists are now questioning the effects of Facebook having this sort of control, and are defending the right to authority to perform this task.

*”The second big explanation [for spread of disinformation] is about Facebooks algorithm: about what’s shown in the news feed and how that enables both filter bubbles and the spread of obviously false information. A change to the algorithm last summer led to any site at all, for example the ‘fake-factories’ in Macedonia, suddenly was given an opportunity to reach a much larger audience, as they in practice was given more importance by the algorithm than for example CNN and New York Times”*  
(Jönsson, 2017b).

*”Even before social media became a source for news, media institutions and newspapers filtered what news that were shown. But while the employees there was trained in source criticism, it’s now up to each user to filter on their own. [...] Facebook can basically do what they want but can’t be regulated. However, we need to discuss that what we’re reading is not an organic product. The algorithms in control are driven by profit”*  
(Jones, 2016)

*If Facebook doesn’t take responsibility for the content published on it’s site, then who will? And how is social structure affected when fake news suddenly is able to reach millions of readers? (Barr, 2016).*

*”Fact-resistance is growing, opinions are considered as facts and conspiracy-theories thrive in the filter-bubbles of the web. News-avoiders ignores traditional medias attempts to describe the world. Either because they don’t care what’s going on, or because their worldview is not confirmed. (Avellan, 2016)*

Some texts also directs accountability inwards, towards the traditional news media sphere. In a very clear example of protecting autonomy by defending editorial control from non-journalistic actors, Jan Scherman of Aftonbladet states that *”the lie has become profitable”*, suggesting that media institutions might be pressured into publishing questionable material by their owners/management since they know that a story with, for example an outrageous Trump-quote, be it a true or false one, will be a real *”click-monster”*, a cash cow for the newspapers owners:

*”The challenges for independent journalism are depressingly large. I put the 250 years of Swedish freedom of press behind me with a big worry. Not least because the debate about the threats [of fake news and disinformation] consistently lost the perspective of the power of money. Not least because we, including myself, has been naive when it comes to spreading force of the lies, and thus their commercial utility.” (Scherman, 2016)*



Likewise, Karl Sigfrid of Svenska Dagbladet questions the reporting and framing by Swedish media of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton during the US election, where he argues that Clinton was framed in a much better light than Trump. He suggests a bit of navel-gazing could be needed from traditional journalists:

*”The made-up news that spread online won’t disappear. Politicians, government agencies and media who wants to counteract disinformation should first and foremost review their own communication. Is it objective? Is it credible enough to not have the recipient go for a hunt after alternative sources?”* (Sigfrid, 2017)

### **5.3 Reclaiming the definition**

The third theme revolved against threats to the journalistic paradigm coming from actors, often associated with post-truth culture, who labelled traditional media outlets as ”fake news” in an attempt to sway its negative connotation towards traditional news media rather than the post-truth content it is commonly referred to by journalists and in mainstream society as a whole. The main participants that were defended against was Donald Trump and his administration, so called alternative media and other ultrapartisan websites, and the ”alternative right”-political movement, often seen as supporters and beneficiaries of the two former. Just as with directing of blame, this theme was found in both protection of autonomy and expulsion-type of boundary work. ”Paradigm boosterism” makes a comeback as many of the texts made their point by contrasting poor journalistic qualities of post-truth content with the ethically and professionally superior qualities of traditional journalism. Additionally, like the previous theme, this one could be found around the variant of expansion-type boundary work for this study labelled ”expansion light”, where traditional journalists makes a point of accepting some of the criticism used to label them as fake news, such as misleading headlines or sensationalism, without fully expanding or changing the paradigm to fit the criticism.

While traces of this theme could be found in earlier texts as well, it really started to take off after Donald Trump held a press conference where he called CNN reporter Jim Acosta and his employer ”fake news”. As was soon to be evident, this didn’t sit well with traditional journalists: *”Donald Trump calls CNN fake news. That shows that he and other media critics have no idea what the concepts means”* writes DN columnist Erik Helmersson, and continues:

*It’s become more and more common among critics of ”mainstream media” to accuse them of [spreading fake news]. It’s a sort of newspeak that’s aimed towards traditional media institutions both in Sweden and abroad: ’You all talk about how Breitbart and Aypixlat spread fake news, but it’s you yourself who does it.’ [...] and I understand the reaction. Everyone has read things in the newspaper that they think were wrong. Everyone has felt bothered by inflated journalists and know-all tones. But let me just apply that tone right*

*now and declare one thing straight: there is a huge difference between fake news and real journalism (Helmerson, 2017).*

Actually, this response to Trump's claims was largely a repeat of another op-ed by Helmerson from December 2016, regarding pizzagate, where he stated in a similar manner, but with even more focus on the "expansion light"-type of boundary work:

*"Traditional media will always accidentally publish incorrect facts. We will print articles that are sloppily framed, that has a bad selection of interviewees, and that, with all facts on hand, shouldn't have been published at all. We will probably need to be even better regarding transparency and to show greater humility towards issues with our reporting. But those who wishes a speedy death upon traditional media might perhaps be careful about what they wish. A fact proven by pizzagate." (Helmerson, 2016)*

Helmerson and his colleagues at DN isn't alone in this sort of criticism against Trump's labelling of CNN as fake news. Plenty of column inches were dedicated to explaining why Trump was wrong in doing that, and what the fake news concept 'actually is' compared to 'proper' traditional media institutions like CNN. Some examples:

*"[Trump] unfortunately also confirmed that he can't see any difference between journalism and nonsense, established- and "alternative media", opinions and facts. 'Fake news!', Trump snarled at CNN, and didn't let the well established TV-company ask any questions whatsoever" (Avellan, 2017a).*

*"Whereas [author George] Orwell had his truth ministry, our time has an american president who describes genuine news reporting as 'fake news', at the same time as his own administrations obvious lies are called 'alternative facts'" (Björkman 2017).*

*In the american debate there is right now one actor who's really hurting the discussion around 'fake news' and that is president-elect Donald Trump. He seem to suggest that every time criticism is directed against him, it's the same thing as untrue journalism (Larsson, 2016).*

*"[The term] has become pretty much meaningless. Now Trump and his supporters are using it as a word for all the news that they don't like. This is precarious terrain. Every open and democratic society needs free press and access to facts and information that is objective and correct." (Larsson, 2017).*

*"The point is to turn concepts upside-down. Suddenly, it's CNN and SVT that is 'fake news', not Breitbart or Aypixlat. Suddenly, kindness is something suspect, suddenly we have 55*

*no-go zones in Sweden, suddenly there is a system collapse, suddenly facts are opinion, suddenly hot dogs and ice cream are pretty much the same pizza.” (Virtanen, 2017b)*

It's clear from the "expansion-light"-texts that journalists have accepted some of the criticisms that post-truth culture are using to label them fake news, with many texts including a bit of self-awareness regarding some of the more criticized practices of traditional journalism, as seen in Helmersson's editorial above. This is then contrasted to fake news-items who are presented as being "even worse" in a sense. In Aftonbladet, columnist Fredrik Virtanen writes about an article that was published by his paper, and then retracted when turned out to be untrue, about a man who had robbed an ATM:

*”Not a highlight in the papers 186-year history but similar mistakes has happened before and will happen again. It has nothing to do with ”fake news”. [...] And sometimes we frame things in stupid, silly, or exaggerated ways. Nor is that fake news. Nor does the media conspire to cover-up ”sensitive topics”, usually issues with multiculturalism, but that is a convenient statement for politicians or opinion leaders who wants to make themselves known as brave truth-tellers.”*

He goes on to blame Donald Trump and the "alternative right" for this definitional confusion, and relocates Trumps' tweets about calling media like CNN and BBC fake into a Swedish context, playing with the thought of someone labelling Sweden's biggest TV-networks, TV4 and public service SVT, as fake news:

*”And one can whine about TV4 for a lot of things but TV4 don't lie. TV4 don't cover-up. TV4 is not fake news. Such claims is also the Swedish alternative right's way of flipping concepts that apply to alternative media to create maximum confusion. But how can I prove this? I can't. It's up to every citizen to pick sides in this war. [...] Journalists are in truth no flawless geniuses, there are no thousand kronor bills in ATM's god damnit! But you will miss us when we're gone. Even me.” (Virtanen, 2017a)*

Another editorial in similar style published unbylined by DN:

*”There's a misconception, gladly brokered by those who want to hurt the media, that it's all about framing and presentation. That the traditional news media provides their view, the alternative media provides theirs, and then one gets to pick which truth one believes in. But there are of course many crucial differences. Certainly, traditional media sometimes publish errors, make biased framing and publishes data that have failed fact-checking reviews. The difference is that traditional media companies follows the ethical rules for press. These provide no comprehensive protection but are intended to protect against*

*smearing and distortion. Manufacturers of fake media, on the other hand, are just looking to mislead, smear and lie, or just to make money” (DN, 2017).*

Thomas Mattson, publisher at Expressen but here writing for their sister-paper Kvällsposten, sets out to clear up any confusion about the definition, and in the next breath both boosts the journalistic paradigm and uses expulsion techniques to express how creators and disseminators of fake news-items are non-journalistic actors:

*”Fake news refers to, should be said, purposely false information that’s disseminated to make money or impart on others a political agenda. It’s not, as sometimes claimed, misunderstandings or mistakes or facts which are later corrected in for example an ongoing news coverage. [...] My advice was therefore for critical media consumers to stick to established media, well known brands who have announced a publisher and affiliated themselves with the press ethic system. So called alternative media and aggressive anonymous users in social media, on the other hand, are no intermediaries of information; these apostles of hate only wants to, often with xenophobia and even racism, differentiate between people.” (Mattson 2017a)*

Freelance columnist, journalist and media personality Alex Schulman, writing for Expressen, criticises a morning news-show on TV4 who had a section about fake news but used two examples that would be better off categorized as journalistic mistakes:

*”It was all very confusing as none of these news items are examples of fake news, and I thought it was interesting that the fake news concept has now shifted so much in meaning that it’s barely usable anymore. Just so we’re all in agreement: Fake news is a conscious dissemination of disinformation in the shape of a news article [...] a way of deceit that’s most often done for political reasons. [...] Therefore it was nice that they had a name for it, fake news, that the public was warned of it, and there was a consensus that lie is lie and truth is truth. We were during a couple of promised days in agreement, most of us, that fake news is no good. Then came Donald Trump.”*

Similar to previous examples in this theme, he goes on to do a bit of ”expansion-light” boundary work by defending journalists as capable of mistakes, but not of fabrications, relating to a quote in BBC by a Swedish government minister who’s statement was accused by the opposition as being fake news:

*”No, Elisabeth Svantesson, it’s not fake news. Ylva Johansson might have been offhandedly quoted. She might’ve even been wrong. But [publishing her statement] is not fake news. Not by a long shot” (Schulman 2017).*

Finally, in an interesting take on this theme, Aftonbladet reporter Staffan Lindberg published an editorial called *"They're accusing me of spreading fake news"*, where he takes the reader through a story of how his reporting on the abuse of refugees by Hungarian police in a refugee camp on the Serbian-Hungarian border, led to the Hungarian government accusing him of not doing his job properly and of producing fake news. They argued in a communique that reports of refugee abuse was false, brought up by bad eye-witness accounts, and that *"nothing prevents author Staffan Lindberg from making fact-based reports at different locations in Hungary. However, he has not done that, and that was up to him."* In his text, Lindberg seems a bit agitated how he, as a traditional journalist, can be accused of such a thing. He goes on to describe in more detail how the report came about, how several reliable witnesses were in fact interviewed, and basically tries to convey that this article could clearly not be fake news, since it was, as he writes *"a news report made in accordance with accepted journalistic methods"* (Lindberg, 2017). A clear way of stating that the journalistic paradigm does not create fake news.

#### **5.4 Traditional journalism as the saviour of democracy**

The last theme that Swedish journalists performed boundary work around regarding the fake news concept revolves around instances where they took a look at the bigger, societal picture, where the possibly harmful effects fake news and post-truth culture might have on our society is communicated. Boundary work is then done by touting traditional journalism as a remedy or defence against these harmful effects. This type of boundary work could be understood as a form of expulsion, where the deviant, i.e., the concept of fake news and post-truth culture, is not only pushed away from the journalistic boundaries and its paradigm, but considered an immediate threat to a functional democratic society, almost as if the journalists are not only defending their own paradigm but a democracy paradigm as well. *"Doing double duty"* as Berkowitz (2000) put it. Ultimately, this theme defends the importance of the journalistic paradigm by making suggestions that traditional journalism is an invaluable institution for a functioning liberal democracy to work at all - an integral part of the open, democratic society. There's a focus within this theme on the propaganda-type of misinformation, as well as the misleading news-type, thus the arena of participants is centered around states and ideologies. Russia, with Putin at the front, USA, with, again, Trump at the front, and post-truth culture as a wider ideology are all main participants who are defended against.

As mentioned, the main boundary work carried out within this theme was to emphasize how society has in fact entered a new era, a post-truth era - usually implied to be a pretty grim and dystopian time, especially for proponents of liberal, western democracy - where the practices of traditional journalism are more needed and important than ever. These arguments do have scientific support, as the importance of good information to a function democracy has been widely recognized (see eg. Kuklinski et. al., 2000; Giglieto et.al., Bennet, 2003; Zaller, 2003; Exoo, 2010; Lewandowsky; 2012).

Culture editor of DN, Björn Wiman does not hold back as he argues that recurring, purposely made disinformation into society's information ecosystem will eventually *"canker the entire*

*democratic public communication model: education, the media, science - everything*". His suggestions for how society can stop this dystopian future in its tracks? *"Support your local journalist. [...] Journalism needs you now more than ever"* (Wiman 2017a).

Similarly, in a piece documenting a German fact-checking-project, Arvid Jurjaks, reporter at Sydsvenskan, first 'lays the land' by expelling post-truth content as conspiratorial hate, inserted by certain states, implied in the text as Russia, to erode trust in democratic society:

*"Fake news, that is, false information that is disseminated as news via mainly social media, is nothing new, neither in Germany, Sweden, or any of the other liberal, western democracies. Conspiratorial conceptions that politicians and established media are deceiving the people about issues regarding the climate, immigration and Islam has opened up for a great amount of hateful and racist sites over the years. In symbiosis with nationalistic currents and not least a change in online behavior, fake news has according to several experts grown into a significant political factor that has also been instrumentalized in a new type of information war between countries."*

He goes on to describe how propaganda in the form of fake news might have already affected the outcome of a political election, the US presidential election, and concludes by suggesting that fake news would not be a problem if more people internalized the journalistic paradigm:

*"We need to build a society that thinks and acts journalistically. A society that can question information while at the same time produce new information"* (Jurjaks, 2017)

As with the previous theme, a lot of the discussion on this theme centered around Donald Trump, particularly his labelling of traditional media institutions as fake news, and his comments about the media being "the people's enemy". The boundary work here is done by relating Trump's comments to those of oppressive regimes with state controlled media, and again making the argument that independent media, guided by the journalistic paradigm, is a prerequisite for a functioning democracy, exemplified here by again Björn Wiman of DN:

*"Democracy is put under pressure by forces in the highest place who wants to destabilize it. In these situations, society's institutions are the key to resistance. [...] The actions of the american media in the Flynn case is a hopeful follow-up on [the victory for traditional journalism]. It shows that the Donald Trump administration is not completely immune to the truth, that neither this president can oppose the function professional journalism carries in a functioning democracy. [...] Michael Flynn's departure is a small step backwards for Donald Trump, but a big leap forward for journalism - and democracy"* (Wiman, 2017b).

And again going back to DN's interview of Dean Baquet of the NY Times, we find that some of his statements and boundary work definitely revolves around this theme as well:

*"It's impossible to overstate how subversive it is what is happening right now, both for society and journalism. What Trump is doing is carrying out a revolution, he's blowing up the entire rule of this nation. It implies a huge challenge for us and other traditional media outlets to portray and to tell what's going on."*

He goes on to note how this challenge comes simultaneously as many newspapers have been fighting economic and structural hardships for a while, which makes it harder to tackle the challenge properly as many newsrooms are understaffed, especially with regards to investigative journalism. However, he does note, in sharp contrast to texts around the directing of blame-theme, that audiences might have gained an increased interest in 'proper' traditional journalism, making fake news and post-truth culture a sort of blessing in disguise, and the interview ends with a clear manifestation of journalism as fighters for democracy:

*"What has happened the last year and in particular for the last months have, in many ways, been fantastic for journalism. We're showing that we are important - and the audience are showing that they value [traditional journalism] [...] Our mission has never been more clear: It's standing in the midst of the storm and reporting and obtain the truth. And we will never give up."*  
(Jönsson, 2017b)

Taking a more local approach, Karin Pettersson of Aftonbladet suggests that "media can become the people's enemy in Sweden as well", as a consequence of the increased support for far-right parties, and alternative media. She writes:

*"The common goal [between the Trump administration and the Swedish far right] is to disseminate racist lies. But it's just as much about painting journalists as enemies of the people, as Trump did the other day. This is an idea that's extensively expressed in online environments of the far-right here on home soil as well. If this is established in broad layers, democracy's protection mechanisms are fundamentally weakened. Then, if not sooner, are we in really deep trouble"* (Pettersson, 2017).

Editor-in-chief of Aftonbladet, Sofia Olsson-Olsén, seized the opportunity to use the fake news concept and its threat against democracy to request lower taxations (VAT) on newspapers:

*"The more people forced to leave the journalistic profession, the fewer papers we become, the bigger the threat will be against our democracy. Making it possible for independent*

*journalism to survive in an online world is of great importance as to not let extreme right-wing sites, based on hatred, their own perceived truth, and fake news, to take up a dangerous position. [...] Independent media is a cornerstone of our democracy. In order to maintain our independence, we all need a significantly better digital deal. With reduced VAT we'll get it. And it is very urgent.” (Olsson-Olsén, 2017)*

Additionally, for boundary repair that occurred off-editorial space, in regular news articles, reports and notifications, this was the most common theme. Several of the texts that informed about measures taken by governments or comments made by influential people against the fake news concept can be seen as a form of boundary repair following this theme, where fake news and post-truth culture is implicitly, or explicitly, presented as something the entire society has to fight, whilst at the same time pointing out how traditional journalism is on democracy's "good side". Structuring articles around official statements on the topic by influential actors like the Swedish Prime Minister, relevant government agencies, and even the Pope, allowed journalists to "borrow" the credibility of these actors, using their paradigm-friendly quotes to make expulsion-based statements and to boost the own paradigm:

*”Independent reporting from the media and their ability to unhindered communicate news are key components of our democracy, and important for society's functionality, concludes Nils Svart, temporary director-general of [the Swedish civil contingencies agency] (Nilsson, 2017)*

*”Media outlets who focuses on scandals and spreads fake news to slander politicians runs the risk of becoming as sinful as people with a morbid fascination for feces, according to the Pope” (TT-Reuters, 2016)*

*”The warning issued by prime minister Stefan Löfvén in DN is unfortunately well founded. Trust - between electorate and politicians, between the media and the public - is the foundation of the open, democratic society. It's enemies are aware of that, and they are targeting their attacks thereafter.” (Sydsvenskan, 2017)*

*”Media has an important role in democracy by investigating people in power; the abuse of power and corruption. In a time of fake news and the American governments talk about 'alternative facts', it's especially important to have reliable news media” (Forsberg, 2017).*



In an interview by Caroline Åkerlund from Dagens Industri, American/Polish journalist/author Anne Appelbaum was asked what happens when the public doesn't get their information from the same, established sources, but rather from friends recommendations on social media:

*"Then, democracy can no longer exist. Because when people can't agree upon what the national debate should be about, democracy is no longer working. This can, in turn, only lead to one thing: authoritarian societies, with leaders who try to dictate their own terms and severely limit individual freedoms. We might already have that in the USA, we don't know that yet"*  
(Åkerlund, 2017)

*"Nixon also saw media as the enemy, but he only did it between four eyes. Trump is doing it in front of 25 million followers on Twitter. The media is democracy's watchdog and now, it's important to be on guard."* (Avellan, 2017b)

## 6. Conclusion

To conclude, a summary of the results as they relate to the research questions will be presented, followed by a discussion about how these results in the context of the contemporary discussion regarding fake news from a journalistic standpoint and in relation to previous boundary work research, as well as what the results suggest post-truth culture means for the future of journalism. It will conclude with a look towards where to go next regarding research on the modern concept of fake news.

### 6.1 Research questions

The study began with the premise that journalists work within a culture that shares similar assumptions on how to gather, interpret and present news information - the journalistic paradigm. This paradigm is occasionally subjected to challenges/threats and criticism that suggests that it's not necessarily a stable, 'correct' way of performing news work, but rather that the paradigm is limited, open for challenge, and thereupon questioned if really the objectively defined standard that it's presented as (Hindman 2005). Such a challenge is argued to be posed in present time by the influx of so called fake news - a poorly understood concept lacking in conceptual cohesion - into the information ecosystem, and the subsequent distrust against traditional media, eagerly cheered-on by a culture of so called post-truth, who views traditional media as biased and driven by an agenda. This argument was believed true as several variants of beforehand operationalized boundary could be identified in the texts. Based on this, through qualitative ethnographic content analysis of journalistic texts, this paper explored two general questions - what is fake news, and how, in the light of it, do journalists work to defend their boundaries and status as society's only legitimate producers and presenters of true and fair information?

#### 6.1.1 What is fake news?

The first question asked simply, what is fake news? The not as simple answer will naturally always be a matter of definition, but by taking input from definitions presented by media scholars, historians, journalists and other relevant actors, possibilities to disentangle the definitional confusion emerges. The concept can be thought of as microcosm, containing different types of misleading information. While plenty of different types of such information has been labeled as fake news in the last year, this study argues that there is really only one 'pure' definition of fake news - news items that are completely fabricated, or extremely distorted accounts of real events that include fabricated facts and/or connections, that is made to look like legitimate news with the only intention of gathering clicks and thus monetary rewards from advertising.

However, along with pure fake news, there are other items of misleading information being inserted into the information ecosystem that are made to look like legitimate news items and can, intentionally or unintentionally, spread through the ecosystem. Along with *pure fake news*, two of these are categorized as post-truth content, namely *propaganda* - fake news created and spread by governments and other vested interests; and *misleading news* - heavily biased or exaggerated takes

on real events. The other two are categorized as mainstream content, and include *satire* - fake news created by satirists for humorous purposes; and *journalistic mistakes* - news items published by traditional journalists containing errors. These originate and spread through mainly three channels, *news-imposter outlets* - sites and pages set up to look like a legitimate news outlet but contains very little, if any, legitimate news; *ultra-partisan outlets* - sites and pages driven by a political goal that publish news items; or the *traditional news media* - established news outlets with publishers that adhere to the journalistic paradigm. A visualisation of how these different types of misleading information relates to the different channels, and each other, as well as more detailed descriptions of all the concepts, can be found in and around model 1 and 2 on page 20 and 21.

### 6.1.2 How do journalists defend their status?

The second question asked how, in the light of fake news and criticism from post-truth culture, do journalists work to defend their status as society's only legitimate producers and presenters of true and fair information?

Swedish journalists indeed used boundary work to defend the journalistic paradigm and their professional boundaries from the challenge of fake news and the criticism of post-truth culture, which was centered around four themes. Analysed together, these four themes paints a picture that carries some similarities to other instances previously selected for boundary work-research. Mainly in that a majority of the boundary work revolved around expulsion-techniques, dividing the act of gathering and presenting information, i.e., news making, into a good approach and a bad approach. The traditional journalists naturally attach themselves to the good approach, and marginalizes and distances themselves from the bad approach, i.e., fake news and post-truth, expelling it from the journalistic paradigm. While some criticisms towards traditional journalism was acknowledged, journalists clarified to their readers what the journalistic paradigm is about, the importance of it, how they've always followed it, and how they always will. The Swedish journalists mainly assumed an offensive stance when performing this boundary work, meaning, using what Berkowitz (2000) labeled paradigm boosterism, the journalistic paradigm was thoroughly promoted as *the* way of gathering and presenting news, and generally as a prerequisite for an open, democratic society. Readers were continuously reminded of the paradigm's intrinsic values of objectivity and truth and the important democratic role of journalists as scrutinisers of power and facilitators for free and open discussion. Another common technique to boost the paradigm was done through the juxtaposing of practices and values of post-truth content creators. Their content was painted as a deviant, unethical, non-journalistic product, made by either unscrupulous teenagers, racist far-right websites or the propaganda machinery of different states, most often Russia or USA. While the former are painted as kids simply doing it for the money, the latter are painted as dangerous and sinister, doing it to erode trust in traditional media to advance an agenda. However, no matter the creator, all fake news and post-truth content is collectively seen as a threat to western-style, liberal democracy.

Specifically, the four themes Swedish journalists boundary work was centered around constituted of: **Fake news creators as deviant journalistic actors** - texts that exposed creators of fake news and showed how their practices was bad journalism. This theme and boundary work

could be seen as a response to the criticism that anyone can be a journalist. It defends the status of the traditional journalist by showing the reader that there is a big difference between a trained, professional journalist and a creator of fake news-items, and exactly what that difference constitutes of. **Directing criticism** - texts that suggested media consumers and internet companies are to blame for the rise of fake news and post-truth culture. It can be viewed as a response to criticisms claiming that traditional media is to blame for the rise of fake news and post-truth culture, because of the formers use of sensationalism, biased reporting etc, as it instead blames other actors for this rise. It defends the paradigm by arguing that traditional media has always done their job correctly, but because of social media, search engine-algorithm's and media audiences lack of source criticism, the issue of fake news has laid root in our society. **Reclaiming the definition** - texts that defended against accusations from various actors, mostly inside of post-truth culture, that it is traditional media who should be branded "fake news". This theme defends from criticism that traditional news media is heavily biased, filled with lies, or refuses to tell the full story about certain issues. It defends traditional journalisms position vis-à-vis fake news, by explaining the differences in professional values and practices between traditional journalism and post-truth content. **Traditional journalism as the saviour of democracy** - texts that focused on the potential harm fake news and post-truth culture might cause to society in general and democracy in particular. This theme does not revolve around a specific criticism, but was rather a purely offensive 'attack' against fake news and post-truth culture, alarming the readers to the threats these concepts might cause to society, while also boosting the own paradigm by suggesting that traditional journalism is the ultimate remedy for these dystopian times.

## 6.2 The results in context

What stood out in this study from previous literature was how there seemed to be no differences between tabloids and more traditional daily/morning newspapers. Rather than blaming the tabloids, lifestyle journalism, or other types of journalism, as we've seen happen before (e.g. Berkowitz, 2000; Hindman, 2003, Perreault & Vos, 2016), all styles of newspapers seemed to present a united front against the challenge from fake news and post-truth culture. Tabloids actually provided a lot of discussion on what 'quality journalism' is or should be, something that style of journalism might not generally be known for. Another thing to note is that contrary to previous cases in the literature, the boundary work is somewhat sprawling. The results show a less coherent defense strategy, as broader and more diverse themes could be found here than in previous studies that focused on, for example, princess Diana's death, the Jayson Blair fabrication scandal and the so called *Gamer-gate* scandal (Berkowitz 2000; Hindman 2003 & 2005, Perreault & Vos, 2016), where it was common to only tell the audience what went wrong, centered around one theme, and show how it won't happen again, centered around another one. This could reasonably be argued to stem from the fact that previous research has examined journalists reactions to specific events, while this study examines them in relation to more of a global, ongoing phenomena. Thus, the boundaries aren't as sharp as in a case of a specific event, where it's easier to point at a specific incident of wrongdoing, and simply distance oneself from it. Since the texts under examination for this paper concern a continuous

phenomena, journalists had to first identify different instances where they could create a boundary between good and bad, and then go on to explain how they should be placed on the side of the former, and post-truth culture on the side of the latter. Definitional confusion might also play a part in this, as the multifaceted nature of the fake news might require different journalists to defend different aspects of it. Another thing to note here is that news satire was very rarely mentioned together with fake news, with only two of the 88 examined texts including references to misleading information made for humorous purposes. This could indicate that the journalistic community doesn't acknowledge satire as a threat in the same way they are with post-truth content. Perhaps because of a lack of political agenda, and the fact that the creators are often open with their humorous intentions.

### **6.2.1 Looking forward**

Apropos boundary work providing indications of the future of journalism, there were enough indications to at least make it alluring to suggest that fake news and post-truth culture could act as a sort of watchdog over traditional journalism, as evident by the amount of texts that contained references to how traditional, quality journalism is needed now more than ever, and to measures taken to ensure that producing more quality journalism would be the case going forward. A sort of "after rain comes sunshine"-tone was pervading throughout the material, across all themes, where journalists seemed to realise that the best way of winning back trust would be to work even harder to produce even better journalism, and that now, in the light of post-truth culture, more focus needs to be on investigative, "classic" journalism. Thus, just as traditional journalism can be seen as a watchdog over the people in power, keeping them in check and alerting of any wrongdoings, fake news and post-truth culture could then be seen as keeping traditional news media in check, forcing them to keep sensationalism and gossip at a minimum and instead work on quality, investigative journalism to continuously keep fake news and other post-truth content at arms length by showing how 'real journalism is supposed to be'. A "fifth estate" as the phenomena has been labeled when referred to blogger for example (Berkowitz & Schwartz, 2016). Berkowitz & Schwartz (ibid) found this kind of relationship between news satire and traditional news, so it's not a far fetched thought, though acknowledging that economic struggles and other factors might affect just how much newspapers can invest towards more quality journalism. Additional research with appropriate focus will be needed to find further support for such a relationship, however.

In the other end of the spectrum, seeing as many traditional media outlets has already started sister-outlets to monetise off of "clickbait"-articles and viral memes, and how there is obviously money to be made in the publishing of fake news, it will also be interesting to follow the situation Scherman (2016) fears, where the "lie is monetised", and even the traditional outlets start to eschew press ethics to be able to publish that one juicy headline about Trumps secret bat cave.

The, although expected, lack of true expansion-type boundary work suggests that the journalistic paradigm is unlikely to change in the near future, as nothing about fake news or post-truth culture was ever embraced by the journalists. The exception would be, of course, if the above mentioned fears of "monetising the lie" would come true. Rather, the empirical material indicate that journalists are prepared to strengthen the borders even more so to speak, as the paradigm is

many times suggested as more important than ever, and, while accepting some criticism, firmly rallied behind.

This research adds to the literature in a number of ways. Firstly, it provides urgently needed definitional clarification of the diffusing concept of fake news. Secondly, it expands understanding of how journalists use boundary work to re-assert and defend their professional status when it is threatened, by looking at case where the threat is not one event, but rather a continuous phenomenon and cultural worldview. A limitation of this study stems from the fact that these conclusions of how journalists have related to the fake news concept and post-truth culture are solely based on content. It would be interesting, and certainly a suggestion for further research, to study the actual news making process in relation to fake news, through observations and interviews with journalists, to see if and how the daily routines, practices or the "talk of the shop" has changed in the light of fake news and post-truth culture. This study might also been enhanced by a broader selection of data, examining and comparing any differences between how fake news is reported on in different countries with different media systems, also something suggested for further study. As this study is focused on Sweden, only discussion from journalists within the north/central Europe- or "Democratic Corporatist"-model have been included in the data, and the framework was mainly based on viewpoints from this or the North Atlantic or "Liberal" model of US and UK. There is a strong, and interesting, possibility that the third media system of the western world, the Mediterranean or "Polarized Pluralist Model", provides a different outlook at any threat posed by fake news or post-truth culture towards the journalistic paradigm, as the level of professionalization is generally lower in this model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

Studies focused on further examining this study's suggestion of the post-truth phenomena as a culture is also an intriguing thought. Post-truth have "its own" media, as well as "its own" way of doing politics, view of democracy, social norms - regarding lies for example, heroes and villains etc. Certainly enough to keep any anthropologist occupied. A closer look at celebrity-gossip "supermarket tabloids" in relation to fake news as a part of mainstream misleading content could be the next step for adding to the fake news-taxonomy. Overall, any scientific interest in the modern fake news concept should be welcomed, as it is an evolving concept that has evidently grown into a big part of contemporary society, but where academic literature is limited to similar, adjacent concepts. Hopefully, this path-seeking study is only the start of more on this important and intriguing topic.

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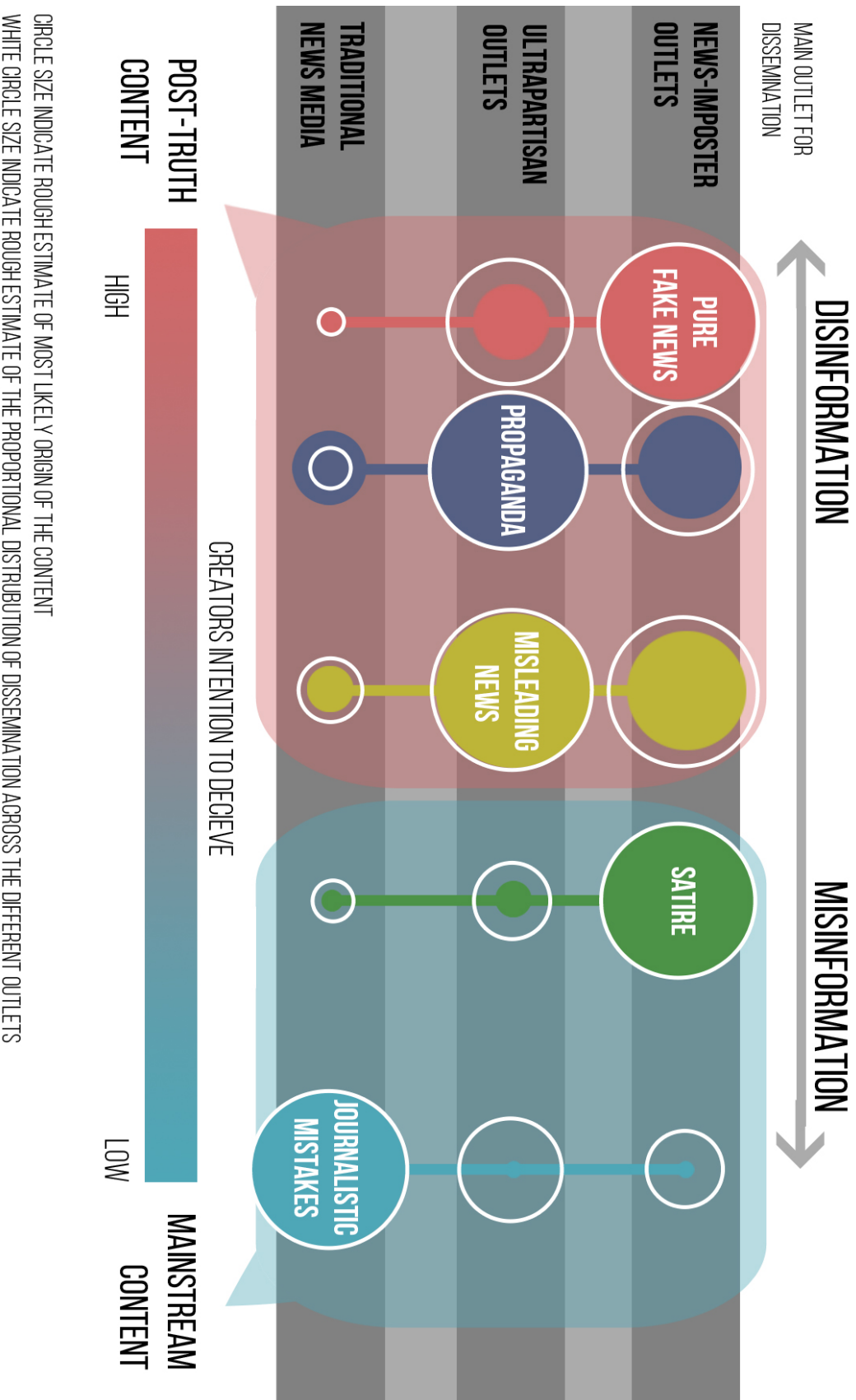
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# THE FAKE NEWS MICROCOSM



**8.1 Appendix 1.**  
 Model 1.

## 8.2 Appendix 2.

Model 2.

