

# Fake News and Cinema: Film Analysis in Europe and the United States

Carlos Serrano Martín<sup>1</sup>, Isaac Lòpez Redondo<sup>1</sup>, Luisa Aramburu Moncada<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Seville, Spain

Correspondence: Carlos Serrano Martín, University of Seville, Spain.

Received: November 8, 2023

Accepted: February 1, 2024

Online Published: February 18, 2024

doi:10.11114/smc.v12i1.6741

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v12i1.6741>

## Abstract

How does cinema reflect the reality of fake news? This paper answers this question. To the existing studies on cinema and journalism we want to add, under a qualitative analysis, the following point of view: those information professionals who defend professional malpractice because it is what the public demands. We understand qualitative methodology as the action of giving the film pieces analysed the category of primary source. We understand primary sources as those in which the data come directly from the population or a sample of the population (Torres, Paz and Salazar, 2014, p. 3). In this case, we are not talking about people, but about films.

The viral is present in news consumers who, despite having more capacity to communicate than ever, are victims and, at the same time, part of the problem in the rapid spread of fake news. On the one hand, the audience is a victim because their right to be informed with a quality news product is being violated. Secondly, it is also part of the problem. It is not possible for malicious information to have a strong influence on society if there is no audience to consume it. That is, without a prior critical analysis of the product they are consuming. The films analysed have shown us that the population must assume certain responsibilities in order to avoid the disastrous consequences of fake news.

**Keywords:** cinema, journalism, fake news, information business, journalistic ethics, mass media

## 1. Introduction

When it comes to indicating the direct consequences of the proliferation of fakes news, it should be noted that they are palpable in several recent events: from the radicalisation of opinions to the attacks suffered by several media outlets by political forces (Rodríguez Pérez, 2019: 66). The most striking is the loss of informative quality that part of the journalistic profession has allowed. It has accepted that its work depends, to a large extent, on being a mere mouthpiece for news previously processed by private organisations whose goals are far removed from the purely informative. In the words of Professor of Journalistic Writing López Hidalgo (2020):

In all likelihood, many pages of printed and digital newspapers were produced from the newsroom of the medium, full and oversized with possible news from institutions and organisations, already written beforehand to facilitate the work of professionals, a look already placed before their eyes, statements served at the whim of each one, like the chef who serves the sauce to the diner's taste for the meat or fish of the most exquisite dish.

How has cinema reflected some of these issues? In general terms, the seventh art has focused on the power that the media has over the collective imagination (Pardo, 2001). By way of example, if we turn to American cinema, this is the starting point of *John Doe* (Capra, 1941). The success of a fake letter published in a newspaper prompts a journalist, herself the author of the letter, to hire a tramp who ends up being the voice and body of her own literary character. But one of the best examples of fake new cinema is found in the footage of *The Smokescreen* (Levison, 1997). In the film, a team of advisors create a false declaration of war against Albania so that, just days before a presidential election, a sex scandal involving the President of the United States will not be reported in the media. This synopsis brings to mind the citation of Aidan White (2007): "Fake news, political and corporate propaganda and shameful abuses on digital platforms threaten democracy and, at the same time, open new fronts for free expression advocates, policy makers and media professionals".

The cinema has also offered the behaviour of audiences in the face of the media manipulation of fake news. Typically, the lack of critical thinking on the part of the average consumer is highlighted. The Polish film *Hater* (Komasa, 2020) is a case in point. In this film, social networks take centre stage instead of the traditional media, as was the case in the aforementioned films. Secondly, , Tomasz's character is hired by the director of a digital marketing agency to carry out all kinds of smear campaigns:

Using fake news and its viralisation, he succeeds to such an extent that the influencer decides to quit her channel because of the moral and psychological damage that social networks have caused her. Realising Tomasz's skills, Beata gives him a new job: to find, plant or manipulate information that discredits a candidate for mayor of Warsaw (Pawel Rudnicki), who impedes the goals of one of the agency's clients<sup>1</sup>

One of the consequences reflected in the film is that sharing the wrong news on our social networks is a quick action. However, its effects take much longer to dissipate. According to Neil Levy (2017): "Sometimes, of course, we are mistaken and misled, and a false statement comes to be categorised as a belief. But the problem can be solved with a retraction. If all goes well, finding good evidence that a statement is false results in its reclassification". By way of conclusion, cinema has reflected on the truthfulness of information that it is vitally important to know how to differentiate where I can consume an information product and place my trust.

## 2. Method

These lines aim to analyse how cinema has reflected the phenomenon of fakes news. The research is based on one main question: how has cinema reflected the media consumer in the face of the fake news phenomenon? We opted for a qualitative methodology because it is the one that best suited the content analysis of the filmic text. What does it consist of? According to Bernete (2013, p.221): "Content analysis is a systematic and objective methodology because it uses procedures, variables and categories that respond to defined and explicit study designs and analysis criteria. For this reason, it allows comparative studies to be carried out between different documents, or different objects of reference; between different sources or epochs". We started with a broad question and then broke it down into more specific questions to take the place of hypotheses typical of quantitative research (Krause, 1995). These questions are: How do journalists deal with the fake news phenomenon, what is the companies' news strategy, and how does the audience react?

The following films make up the exhibition: *Hero by Accident* (Frears, 1992), *The Last Vow* (Stern, 2008), *Scandal* (Kurosawa, 1950), *Unveiling the Truth* (Reiner, 2017), *A Game of Wits* (Weingartner, 2007) and *Juninatten* (Lindberg, 1940). What do these films have to offer to be part of the exhibition? A plot driven by the phenomenon of fake news. Their synopses revolve around an information professional, or professionals, who have had to deal with the consequences of the publication of such false information. On the other hand, they are an example of a news company that has carried out a specific business strategy provoked by these consequences. In addition, their footage also shows an audience that has a specific reaction to the published material.

The following path was taken to reach these titles for viewing and subsequent analysis:

\*The sample was intended to be as varied as possible in terms of the nationalities of the films. For the same reason, several titles were left out in order to avoid "temporal repetition" in the years of production. The aim was to achieve as much variety as possible in the time axis that forms the final sample.

\*Films that did not show the object of study in the desired depth were left out. Hence the absence of classic titles such as *All the President's Men* (1976). It deals deeply with journalism, but not from the point of view that interests this work.

Following these steps already listed, the titles were chosen for the reasons given when explaining the objectives. The following is a list of what makes each of the following works part of the sample as an individual unit of analysis:

- *Hero by Accident* (1992): the footage raises an interesting debate: should the media entertain as well as inform? (United States).
- *The Last Vote* (2008): The film raises the question of how a confusion without malice can become a media circus (United States).
- *Scandal* (1950): The acceptance of thousands of readers towards the press executed through professional malpractice is at the heart of the film (Japan).
- *Uncovering the truth* (2017): how a media outlet is victorious against a fake new created by a government is the main action in this title (United States).
- *A Game of Intelligence* (2007): the synopsis shows how we are deceived in audience measurement to create a world tailored to the needs of large multinationals (Germany).

---

<sup>1</sup> Jan Komasa's Hater and fake news: How often do we see real news on social media? Available at: <https://mediacionescch.com/2021/10/hater-de-jan-komasa-y-las-fake-news-cada-cuando-vemos-una-noticia-real-en-las-redes-sociales/>

- *Juninatten* (1940): a young reporter justifies his malpractice for his readers (Sweden).

Two screenings were carried out. The first was to check that the footage met the requirements to be part of the investigation. A second viewing had the task of capturing certain frames to visually assist the analysis. Direct quotes were taken from characters who support the ideas expressed in the film, and which we therefore deduced as analysts.

In the words of Zunzunegui Díez (2007:57):

(...) Analysts deal with how films say what they say, which is quite a different thing. It is true that between the how and the what there is no Chinese wall separating one thing from the other, but the analytical point of view does not consist in interpreting the work but in highlighting the elements that the work puts into operation to produce meaning (...).

For this reason, we pour these direct quotations into the analysis. We grant the filmic text the category of primary source.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. *Should the Media Entertain as Well as Inform? Hero by Accident (1992)*

In *Hero by Accident* (1992) Bernie LaPlante's character performs a huge heroic act by rescuing several people after a plane crash. Among the rescued travellers is television reporter Gale Gayley. She sees the story as her life's work, but Bernie has disappeared. He doesn't want the limelight, which John Bubber takes advantage of to pose as the hero. "(...) In principle, it is to be welcomed that he intends to attack the populist manipulation of collective tragedies, in any of the mass media, based on the levers inherited from the good old days of American comedy (...)" (Aguilar, 2009: 718).

Before the plane crash, the film answers an important question: how are we introduced to Gale's way of working? At the start, the first thing he asks his cameraman, interviewing a man who has jumped off a ledge, is whether he has managed to get a good shot: "Thanks to sport you learn to follow the ball. Do the epilogue from up there. I'll zoom in from the skyscraper until I find you and then I'll reveal the void," replies the technician. In this film, we see an explanation that is more cinematographic than informative. Entertainment trumps information. Afterwards, the same character does not fail to comment emotionally: "How heroic. What a backlight" as he takes shots of the firemen pushing away the surviving passengers from the crash of the crashed flight in which the main reporter is travelling. "The stories bifurcate, disintegrate and mix, blurring canonical boundaries between plausible fiction, implausible fiction, documentary, news and variety" (Gordillo et al, 2011: 94).

In second place, Gale gives a great emotional charge to his reports, and the suicidal businessman is no exception: "(...) If there is despair among the executives, what about 60 floors below where the hungry and the homeless, the disinherited and the junkies, struggle to survive? From a 60th floor ledge, Channel 4's Gale Gayley spoke to them. What is her boss's view of this reporter's passion: "News junkies. They can't quit".

The accident that drives the plot takes place when Gale has just received an award for his journalistic work. In his thank-you speech, Gale makes a case for achieving that great story that "is not just about uncovering human weakness. With each layer of investigation, it unveils something better and nobler. Something that even inspires us. Gale's proposal is a good example of setting goals for the message on the part of the information professional. In this case, to talk about subjects that make us better people: "(...) present an activity of psychic cohesion on the part of its members as a whole, which makes them participate in a common grouping. This feeling of belonging is significant in societies with a high degree of individualism" (Castillo Esparcia, 2011).

Gale takes the first flight from New York back to the newsroom to continue covering the story of the businessman who jumps into the void in the middle of his interview. It is this flight that is the accident. As usual, the reporter will once again use a montage whose mission is to strike a chord with the audience. Gale narrates the following about how he experienced his rescue from the crash:

Out of the darkness, smoke and panic, emerged a man with no name. Out of uniform, but full of courage. A man who thought not of himself, but of others. He risked his life for us. He's out there somewhere. And whoever he is, all of us survivors of Flight 104 say thank you, God bless you.

The story overtakes the reporter when madness breaks out as the channel announces it is offering a million dollars for an interview with the faceless hero. People buy the papers and keep their eyes on the television. That's when the John Bubber character appears on the scene, claiming to be the man. It's a lie. The media snowballs when Vietnam buddies tell the journalist about John's war exploits. They end up awarding this beggar the Medal of Honour, the highest decoration given in the United States Armed Forces.

However, the fame weighs too heavily on John. A powerful pang of guilt overcomes him and he attempts suicide: "At a time like this, don't think about yourself. Just focus, midriff, and the eleven o'clock news. Everyone is counting on you,"

is the thought of Gale's cameraman as he films the fake hero. Fortunately, Bernie LaPlante comes to his aid. There is a whole crowd waiting to see how events unfold. Gale's formula, coupled with the information power of an unknown hero, has paid off. There are even John Bubber dummies. All in all, Gale is not a bad pro. We can't say that he is malpractising.

His reports and live connections are full of emotion as he chooses the most human side of the stories he tells the audience. Especially in the case of the plane crash he experienced first-hand. "(...) In these scenarios, journalism of testimony can be exercised, explaining what has been seen and experienced personally and what has been told by the protagonists on the ground. But some catastrophes leave so much devastation and pain that the witness journalist succumbs to his or her emotions and cannot separate them from his or her informative discourse (...)" (Rodríguez & Odriozola Farré, 2012: 579).



Figure 1. Bernie (Dustin Hoffman) tries to stop John (Andy Garcia) from committing suicide. Source: Filmin.es

In the news of John's possible suicide, the public responds unpredictably: they create T-shirts and toys. They even flock to watch if the hero finally jumps into the void. How to explain this behaviour? Tapias Hernández (2019) argues that: "Several studies have shown that information processing biases occur due to the emotions experienced by viewers when watching audiovisual materials; people even adopt the emotions portrayed on television, show empathy for the characters, become immersed in the narrative, or go through other affective processes". The audience in this case experiences a macabre mixture of concern and morbidity for John.

### 3.2. *How to Make a Media Circus: The Last Vote (2008)*

Reporters sometimes have to fight hard not to fall into the trap of focusing on entertaining rather than reporting. This is the way of working that television often demands. The goal is to achieve a good audience share.

In the configuration of cultural values in our society, institutions such as the school, the family, the Church, the university, etc., converge... Now we know that television has also cooperated decisively in this configuration, at least for 60 years (...) And when, in the context of efficiency, we talk about values, it is very easy for the predominant value to end up being the pure and simple value of money, or that of strictly immediate sensible pleasure.

(Siloé del Pozo, 2005:133)

A case in point is journalist Kate Madison, who covers the incredible story of Bud Johnson in *The Last Vow*. Bud lives with his daughter Molly in a humble New Mexico town. Molly pretends that her father cares more about the upcoming US presidential election. She goes so far as to try to forge his vote. Her father gets drunk in the cantina and forgets to vote. That vote, due to an electronic error, has not been counted. Bud has to vote again: his vote decides the presidency in a very close election. This situation causes the candidates to rush to New Mexico to win Bud's vote. The film, as can be deduced, is a clear example of political comedy and satire. "Aristotles declared that in comedy the hero (by which he meant the character) imitates ridiculous actions. However, it should be noted that throughout the history of comedy, mockery emerged, in which there is irreverence and nonchalance in the face of everything transcendental, power and morality" (Prudencio Lozano & Giraldo Marín, 2020:51).

Kate is the journalist who discovers that Bud has to vote again. However, she is very slow in delivering material for her network. She doesn't take a step without scrupulously ensuring it is the right one. Her boss despairs that the other

networks have better ratings when Kate's network is the one that broke the scoop: "You broke the story, and that's why everyone wants to take it off your hands. You want a job in New York? You want a job in Los Angeles? Then do some soul-searching and forget what you learned in journalism school, because this isn't news anymore, it's not life, it's something bigger: this is television". We can deduce from these words of the director the shock that the differences between the content received in university life and the reality of the news market represent for journalists.

(...) And although it is true that the contributions introduced by the formal teaching of journalism resulted in greater concern on the part of professionals in the social and political context, as well as in greater specialisation; resentment from and towards the schools of communication and journalism themselves abound at different levels of intensity.

(Mellado Ruiz, 2009)

Indeed, all the people go crazy with the media attention on Bud. The candidates are even constantly changing their political programme to get his vote. An army of journalists waits for statements and broadcasts live right in front of Bud's motorcade. Meanwhile, Kate continues to be pressured to make her coverage more spectacular: "You hear that? That sound...click, click, click. It's the sound of millions of remote controls changing channels when they see you. Click equals death. You have to give them a reason to watch us. It's prime time. The key word is news. Find me something," his director urges him.

As in *Hero by accident*, entertainment wins over news due to the public's more favourable response to a certain way of reporting away from the codes of the news. According to Casero Ripollés & Marzal Felici (2011: 11): "(...) in television news there is a very clear evolution from a more or less "informative" paradigm to one that is closer to the construction of reality as spectacle or to a conception of television information as a product of entertainment, in the logic of the "society of the spectacle" in which we live, following the expression of Guy Débord".



Figure 2. Kate tries to get an exclusive interview with Bud. Source: filmaffinity.com

### 3.3. *The Publishing Success of the Tabloids: Scandal (1950)*

*Singer and artist in love* - this is the headline chosen by the editor of Amour magazine when two photographers bring him a stolen photo of the singer Miyako Saijo with the painter Ichirô Aoye. After proposing the headline and the layout of the magazine, an Amour employee tries to impose a minimum of good investigative work: "But we'll have to investigate further," he says. "Don't worry. Even if it's a story, if it's in the magazine, people will believe it. With that picture, the story is perfect," the editor argues. He is well aware that the bigger the scandal, or gossip, on the cover, the more people buy his magazine. The print run runs out quickly and Amour has to order 100,000 more copies. The editor of the report had a few misgivings: "I made up a story based on a photo". "In publications like this, details don't matter much," the editor tries to console him. This brief dialogue reflects the lack of scruples of this type of journalism. "(...) From the chronicles of events to radio and television talk shows, there are hours and hours of broadcasting that invade homes, journeys to work, trips and, in short, take over the everyday life of our society" (Pérez Curiel, 2006: 116). As a

consequence, the painter shows up at the editorial office and attacks the editor. This provokes more rivers of ink. "I will fight for freedom of the press", the assaulted man said at a press conference. "The article is much worse than violence", is the painter's response.



Figure 3. Japanese poster for the film Scandal. Source: filmaffinity.com

Focusing on the female lead, Miyako is very afraid. She fears that the lawsuit the painter wants to file will lead to more publicity. "The current trend is to have fun revealing private lives. The public enjoys seeing people ruined," says a lawyer who comes to the painter's house, Otokichi Hiruta. Once again, a dart against the audience of the tabloid press. Soto Vidal (2005:195) offers two arguments about the triumph of the tabloids that can be seen in this film:

First, because there are too many of the same kind of programmes and material is needed at all costs, whatever its quality or even its dubious provenance or veracity. Secondly, because many of these programmes are structured around mere confrontation, discussion or provocation, as well as the fact that they offer certain "exclusives" of a sexual nature about some of the leading figures in the tabloids.

Both protagonists have to deal with the consequences of their media popularity. The singer is worried, her fans write letters against her for being seen in hotels with strangers, but her representative sees publicity. She says not to cancel, as the controversy created by the magazine's publication does not affect her. She continues to fill the stages where she performs. The painter's new exhibition is a great success, but he is disappointed: "All they want is more scandal", he laments.

#### 3.4. Readership Malpractice: *Juninatten* (1940)

*Juninatten* (1940) also offers an insight into what drives certain reporters to fall into yellow journalism. In the story, Kerstin Nordback is the focus of several front pages in her hometown because she is shot by her lover, whom she tried to leave. At the trial, a photographer takes a picture and the judge demands the film. The photojournalist will deliberately hand in the wrong plate. His fellow editor does not understand why he is not allowed to take pictures: "Small-town behaviour", he curses. Nordback faints in the middle of her statement, the photographer, on the advice of his colleague Willy, takes another picture of her as she is led out of the courtroom. The published headline is: The wounded swan sings. Now, this kind of practice is not approved by the editor and publisher of the newspaper Mr. Wilson:

What is this, what kind of insipid yellow journalism is going on behind the back of my newspaper? What a surprise to come home. There's no one to clean the puppies' nappies (...) Since when do reporters decide policy? Next, the caretaker or the shareholders will tell me what to think. I did an editorial on juvenile delinquency and promiscuity based on those issues in Gustaffgurd, the best article I ever wrote. Best article I've ever written. How can I publish it now? Rubbish reporting.

When it is pointed out to him that other newspapers have started publishing about the trial, with headlines such as

Romance of Violence, Collapse of Traditions and Juvenile Delinquency, Mr Wilson decides to defend the youth in his paper: "Romance of Violence? Juvenile Delinquency? I don't know young people. The girl is pure as an angel. Whatever she has done. Young, passionate, a new Juliet. A child, a daughter of love and death. Romance of violence... I will write a new piece in defence of youth". On the one hand, we see Mr Wilson's defence of good professional practice. Highlight this business strategy of trying to separate himself from the rest of the titles in terms of content.

A good example, in short, of the search for quality news. As Fontcuberta (1999) points out: "Its parameters are structured around three axes: respect for a code of ethics, the search for its own identity and the coherence of its contents. The guideline is the final result of a process by which a medium decides to offer certain information to public opinion and eliminate others".

Kerstin, fleeing the scandal, ends up in Stockholm. She shares an apartment where she lives with two roommates. One of them, Nika, is an operator for the *Daily News*. Due to a series of misfortunes, Willy meets Kerstin in Stockholm, he quickly goes to the editorial office to deliver a new article. Fortunately, Nika arrives before it can be printed and convinces the editor-in-chief, Mr. Johansson, to prevent Willy's work from being admitted to print. "His reputation will be ruined," Nika argues. Johansson agrees with the operator: "he is right. It will not be printed. Good night". Professional ethics ends up being imposed. However, this is how the second dialogue they must have with Willy about the good ways of practicing journalism will take place:

OK. You are qualified. You have a nose for news. You have a good turn of phrase, but you lack taste. See, that girl was once interesting and pathetic. She represents a particular type: Passion that follows her own destiny. So it was good to write about her. But not more than once. Once again it would be persecution. She would be tasteless and tactless. A journalist must be tactful. He is too young, immature and conceited, cruel. That's youth. But he will learn.

It is then that Willy will defend his way of acting before Nika. Willy's reflection on the audience is interesting. The cinema shows on more than one occasion that the reporter falls into low ethics to carry out his information, but the fact is that public opinion responds affirmatively to such publications by acquiring its corresponding copy:

I did my job. I publish a newspaper full of recipes, baptisms, statue inaugurations, and some literary articles. They will double in a week. What the people want is murder, theft, war and mystery. It has to be sensational so that they read more than the headlines. Other people's misery, that's what they like with their morning coffee. Reporters are no worse than what the public does to us.



Figure 4. Willy observes how his information has been laid out for Nika. Source: screenshot while watching the film.

### 3.5. *How They Deceive Us in Audience Measurement: An Intelligence Game (2007)*

Television producer Raineri will undergo a complete transformation in the way he practices his profession due to a near-death experience. If he is the most sought-after trash TV producer in Germany, he will want to turn television into a cultural oasis. But he must face a problem that was not previously his concern given the high ratings achieved by his previous works: how television audiences are measured. How do you decide what stays on the air and what program disappears? "13,000 thousand people decide what 80 million people watch," Rainer laments after starting a study on

television audience measurements in Germany due to the failure of his social denunciation program titled *Things You Should Know*. This situation brings to mind Yanes Mesa's (2007:355) definition of the importance of mass media for all citizens: "The media are not mere transmitters of truth, but rather offer versions of reality. It must be taken into account that purely informative texts offer implicit persuasion by offering a certain degree and a specific location with which they try to induce the reader towards certain values".

This failure causes them to cancel the cultural program after only broadcasting one episode: "Our viewers are an opportunistic pack. They don't want to feel inferior because they don't read. They want to see boobs and know how to save taxes. That's real life for them. (...) making better people is not our job," argues Rainer's boss, Maiwald. It is this moment when the producer decides to investigate and denounce how a perfect system has been created around junk television for the economic benefit of large multinationals. "The problem is that there will come a day when they will love to see it. They'll be so used to that garbage, they'll want to see it. Their moral sensitivity is systematically destroyed, and in the end they will believe that it is normal that there is only garbage, talk shows and tits on TV. "It's a perfect system, Anna," Reiner explains to his partner. Reiner then decides to replace the home audience meters and change the situation of which programs are the most watched. His crazy television revolution almost caused the bankruptcy of the powerful TTS, a specialist in broadcasting trash programs.

This cultural guerrilla by Reiner highlights the idea expressed by Gutiérrez & Tyner (2012:33): "[...] Perhaps, or surely, if this is the case, it is now more necessary than ever to recover the most critical and ideological approaches of media education for the development of media literacy and digital competence". The protagonist's revolution becomes important, a fact that worries the TTS. Its president, Gründgens, charges against a reporter who asks about the crisis: "We are leaders, unlike your little company". Given the new figures, Gründgens tells Maiwald that he should opt for a more intellectual contest. Finally, Maiwald discovers his former partner's plan:

You have started a trend. And? Now people talk a little about books and not television. But you won't believe that you have changed its nature (...) with television we have created the most stable system that has ever existed. It keeps people off the streets. We don't destroy the world. We are the good ones, we protect him. There is no longer a difference between the media, religion, politics, science or economics. A single device at the service of the well-being of humanity. People go to work. Everything else happens in this box.

On the verge of giving up, Rainer and his team read in the newspaper how the cultural programs continue to be the most watched without them having manipulated the audiences. Seeing how their revolution has triumphed, and there is hardly any room for trash TV in Berlin. Rainer, together with his partners, decides to continue his revolution throughout Germany.



Figure 5. Rainer, with his team, consulting data. Source: filasiete.com

### 3.6. *How a Media Emerges Victorious Against Fake News Created by a Government: Revealing the Truth (2017)*

In 2001, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* published false information about Saddam Hussein's secret weapons. They accepted the reports provided by George Bush Jr.'s cabinet as good. But editors Jonathan Landay and

Warren Strobel decide to follow the path indicated by their own sources. They tell them that there is no evidence of the existence of the famous weapons of mass destruction. This is what they publish on several occasions in their newspaper. Its director, John Walcott, shows his tiredness that none of the 31 newspapers that are part of the media conglomerate, to which the agency he directs belongs, publishes the information of its reporters: "The point is that it makes no sense to be a newspaper of Knight Ridder if you don't publish Knight Ridder articles."

"Your articles don't fit with what we are doing here right now," they argue. "Doesn't the truth sell newspapers anymore?" is Jhon Walcott's response. The American government has created a very well-prepared campaign to justify the invasion of Iraq. The media are complicit in it by not verifying the sources provided to them by the government and military intelligence. "It's propaganda. Your presentation of press releases from the White House, the State Department and the Pentagon... I'm sorry, it's not a real newspaper," laments Jonathan's wife. This is how she gives the reasons that justify her withdrawal as a New York Times subscriber. Writes Alonso González (2019: 31): "Knowledge of reality is what allows us receivers to form opinions about the world around us, however, the permanent flow of information and fake news erode that credibility, generating disinformation, understood as "any false information content that exists." been deliberately created and disseminated" (Wardle, 2018)".

Jonathan Landay tells his partner: "One thing is clear (...) we cannot all be right." At a family barbecue, both editors are criticized for their articles: "It's not only on Fox News. It's in the *Washington Post*, it's in the New York Times. There is evidence in all the dominant media in the country, except yours." In addition to the media with the greatest professional prestige, there is a manipulable population. It considers a false fact to be true because it has been repeated several times in different sources of information.

In the words of Badillo (2019:7): "A new wave of discussion around the complexity of the effects of the media still arrives at the end of the 20th century when the overwhelming appearance of digital networks immediately renews the catalog of experiences available to confirm the unstoppable power of the media to turn their speech into indisputable reality." Walcott continues to encourage his editors not to slow down their research parallel to the official version. Although he notes with disappointment how the rest of the publications of the editorial group in which they work repeat information already published in other media, supporting the theory of Iraqi danger: "One day the New York Times will have to apologize to its readers. When that day comes, are you going to publish your own apology or are you going to publish theirs? Walcott tells his boss, Arthur. After several months of invasion, Knight Ridder Newspapers' team of journalists was recognized as the only media outlet that was right about Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction.



Figure 6. Jonathan Landay and Warren Strobel pursuing their own investigations into the validity of the theory that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction. Source: Filmin.es

#### 4. Discussion

The films analyzed have offered us that the population must assume certain responsibilities to avoid the disastrous consequences that fake news brings. A good example is the citizen collaboration when it comes to convincing themselves that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction in *Revealing the Truth* (2017). In fact, several people go so far as to criticize the two main journalists for not following the official version of events under the argument that the rest of the media do defend the invasion. That is, there is no critical thinking on the part of the reader. On the other hand, the dangerous entertainment/information dichotomy comes into play. Managers are observed putting pressure on their editors in order to achieve greater monitoring of their information product. The tendency to make a genre like news

entertaining has the consequence of turning information into a circus. The audience opts for those representations of reality that make them forget it rather than explain it. Such is the situation reflected in *The Last Vote* (2008).

Certain media outlets directly eliminate the previous division and choose to create an alternative reality based on mere inventions. What drives you to such a business strategy? The good screen quotas and the exhaustion of the print runs. If it is still profitable, from a business point of view, it does not make sense to stop its production.

This is one of the main points of the Japanese film *Scandal* (1950). Let us remember that the journalist who is the protagonist of *Juninatten* directly points to the audience as responsible for his professional malpractice. How has the phenomenon of fake news in films been combated then? It has stood up to independent journalism that has continued to investigate in parallel to the information provided by official sources, and a citizenry that has demanded that the media offer quality information as part of its public service task. This is the great success of the crazy experiment protagonist of the German film *An Intelligence Game*. Reiner gets citizens to stop watching a kind of Oracle of Delphi on television and start looking for alternative sources to be informed about the world around them.

### **Acknowledgments**

Not applicable

### **Authors contributions**

Not applicable

### **Funding**

Not applicable

### **Competing interests**

Not applicable

### **Informed consent**

Obtained.

### **Ethics approval**

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Redfame Publishing.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

### **Provenance and peer review**

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

### **Data availability statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

### **Data sharing statement**

No additional data are available.

### **Open access**

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

### **Copyrights**

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

### **References**

- Alonso González, M. (2019). Fake News: disinformation in the age of the information society. *Ámbitos. International Journal of Communication*, (45), 29-52. <https://doi.org/10.12795/Ambitos.2019.i45.03>
- Badillo, A. (2019). The disinformation society: propaganda, fake news and the new geopolitics of information. Working paper 8/2019 - 14 May 2019 - Royal Elcano Institute <https://media.realinstitutoelcano.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/dt8-2019-badillo-sociedad-de-desinformacion-pr-opaganda-fake-news-y-nueva-geopolitica-de-informacion.pdf>
- Bernete, F. (2013). Content analysis. In Antonio Lucas Marín, Alejandro Noboa (coord.), *Knowing the Social: strategies and techniques for data construction and analysis*, pp. 221-263. [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Francisco-Bernete/publication/341992781\\_Analisis\\_de\\_contenido/links/5edd](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Francisco-Bernete/publication/341992781_Analisis_de_contenido/links/5edd)

42de92851c9c5e8f86c5/Analisis-de-contenido.pdf

- Bezunartea, O. et al. (2007). Film and ethics journalists. *Scopes*, no. 16, 2007, pp. 369-393. [www.redalyc.org/pdf/168/16801621.pdf](http://www.redalyc.org/pdf/168/16801621.pdf)
- Canton Correa, F. J., & Galindo Calvo, P. (2019). Post-truth, social media, and Islamophobia in Europe. A case study: the Notre Dame fire. *RAEIC, Journal of the Spanish Association for Communication Research*, 6(12), 35-57. <http://www.revistaic.eu/index.php/raeic/article/view/205/173>
- Casero Ripollé, A. (Coordinator) & Marzal Felici, J. (Coordinator). (2011). *Journalism on television. New horizons, new trends*. Social Communication.
- Ehrlich, M. C. (2009). Studying the Journalist in Popular Culture, *Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Journal*. 1, 1-11. <http://www.ijpc.org/journal/index.php/ijpcjournal/article/viewFile/7/9>
- Elias, C. (2018). Fakenews, power and journalism in the post-truth era and 'alternative facts'. *Scopes*, No. Oct 40, 2018 <https://idus.us.es/bitstream/handle/11441/71888/4.%20Fakenews%20poder%20y%20periodismo%20en%20la%20era%20de%20la%20posverdad%20y%20hechos%20alternativos.pdf>
- Esparcia Castillo, A. (2011). The media as social and political actors. Power, Media and Society. *Razón y palabra*, N°. 75, 2011 (Issue dedicated to: Basic books in the history of the Ibero-American field of communication studies). <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=3685493>
- Fernández García, N. (2017). Fake news: an opportunity for media literacy. *New Society*, No. 269, pp. 66-77. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=6054552>
- Filmin online film and series platform: [www.Filmin.es](http://www.Filmin.es)
- Fontcuberta, M. (1999). Guideline and quality of information. *Information Notebooks*, No. 13, 1999. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=2938506>
- Frears, S. (director). (1992). *Accidental Hero*. United States: Columbia Pictures.
- Gordillo, I. et al. (2011). Hybridizations of hypertelevision: information and entertainment in infoentertainment models. *Revista Comunicación*, N°9, Vol.1, 2011, pp.93-106. [https://institucional.us.es/revistas/AdMIRA/2011/3.1.1\\_Hibridaciones\\_de\\_la\\_hipertelevision.pdf](https://institucional.us.es/revistas/AdMIRA/2011/3.1.1_Hibridaciones_de_la_hipertelevision.pdf)
- Gutiérrez-Martín, A., & Tyner, K. (2012). Media education, media literacy and digital competence. *Media Education, Media Literacy and Digital Competence. Communicate*, 38, 31-39. <https://doi.org/10.3916/C38-2012-02-03>
- Krause, M. (1995). Qualitative Research: A Field of Possibilities and Challenges. *Revista Temas de Educación*. N° 7. 19-39. [https://gc.scalahed.com/recursos/files/r161r/w24790w/La\\_investigacin\\_cualitativa\\_Un\\_campo\\_de\\_posibilidades\\_y\\_desafos\\_.pdf](https://gc.scalahed.com/recursos/files/r161r/w24790w/La_investigacin_cualitativa_Un_campo_de_posibilidades_y_desafos_.pdf)
- Kurosawa, A. (director). (1950). *Escándalo*. Japón: Shōchiku, Shōchiku.
- Levy, N. (2017) The Bad News About Fake News. *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 6, no. 8, págs. 20-36. <https://social-epistemology.com/2017/07/24/the-bad-news-about-fake-news-neil-levy/>
- Lindberg, P. (director). (1940). *Juninatten*. Suecia: Svensk Filmindustri (SF).
- López Hidalgo, A. (2021). Who do we write for? *Montilla Digital*, 1-2-2021. <https://www.montilladigital.com/2021/02/antonio-lopez-hidalgo-para-quien.html>
- Mellado Ruiz, C. (2009). Evolution of the Occupational and Academic Field of Latin American Journalists: Market Logics and Training Schemes. *Option*, 25(59), pp. 11-24. Retrieved October 10, 2023, from [http://ve.scielo.org/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S1012-15872009000200002&lng=es&tlng=es](http://ve.scielo.org/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1012-15872009000200002&lng=es&tlng=es)
- Michael Stern, J. (director). (2008). *The Last Vote*. United States: Touchstone Pictures.
- Pardo, A. (2001). Cinema as a means of social communication and the social responsibility of the filmmaker. In Codina, Mónica (ed.), *Unprotected Ethics: Essays on Communication Deontology*. Pamplona: Eunsa, pp. 117-141. <https://dadun.unav.edu/handle/10171/35977>
- Pérez Curiel, C. (2006). Media sensationalism: fallacy and rumor, strategy of sources. Published in *Press and Specialized Journalism: III International Congress of Press and Specialized Journalism (History and Current Reality)*. pp. 115.123. <https://idus.us.es/handle/11441/31550>
- Prudencio Lozano, J., & Giraldo Marín, L. (2020). Aesthetics and Narratives of War and Peace. Cinematographic comedy as a way of relating to reality. In Vela Murillo et al. *Contemporary Debates: Resistance to Patriarchy, Peace, and Economies for Life* (pp. 49-61). Armenia-Quindío.

- <https://bdigital.uniquindio.edu.co/bitstream/handle/001/6039/Libro%20Debates%20Contempor%C3%A1neos%20Resistencia%20al%20patriarcado%20Paz%20y%20econom%C3%ADas%20para%20la%20vida.pdf?sequence=1>
- Reiner, R. (director). (2017). *Unveiling the Truth*. United States: Acacia Filmed Entertainment, Castle Rock Entertainment, Savvy Media Holdings.
- Rodríguez Pérez, C. (2019). Don't Say Fake News, Say Disinformation: A Review of the Fake News Phenomenon and Its Implications. *Communication*, (40), 65-74. <https://doi.org/10.18566/comunica.n40.a05>
- Rodríguez, P., & Odriozola Farré, B. (2012). Catastrophes and journalism: the story, the scenarios, the interactions, and the practical and psychological needs of all involved. *Studies on the Journalistic Message*, No. 18, 2, 2012 (Issue dedicated to: Journalism in the Face of Conflicts and Catastrophes), pp. 577-594. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=4647850>
- Siloé del Pozo, M. (2005). Fight for the Audience: Trash TV/Trash Education. *Comunicar*, no. 25, 2005, pp. 131-136. <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/158/15825018.pdf>
- Soto, Vidal, L. (2005). Pink press: the dirty game of journalists and celebrities. *Studies on the Journalistic Message*, 11, pp. 193-209. <https://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/ESMP/article/view/ESMP0505110193A>
- Tapias Hernández, C. (2019). What stimulates emotion in audiences? A case study on persuasion, distortion and emotion in the news. *Anagramas Rumbos y Sentidos de la Comunicación*, 18 (35), July-December 2019, pp. 237-259. <http://www.scielo.org.co/pdf/angr/v18n35/1692-2522-angr-18-35-237.pdf>
- Torres, M., Paz, K., & Salazar, F. G. Data collection methods for research. Retrieved from [http://fgsalazar.net/LANDIVAR/ING-PRIMERO/boletin03/URL\\_03\\_BAS01.pdf](http://fgsalazar.net/LANDIVAR/ING-PRIMERO/boletin03/URL_03_BAS01.pdf)
- Waisbord, S. (2018). Truth is What Happens to News. *Journalism Studies*, 19:13, págs.1866-1878.
- Web The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture (University of Southern California): <https://www.ijpc.org/>
- Website of the FicTrans research project (University of Granada): [https://nar-trans.com/proyecto/sede/?locale=es\\_ES](https://nar-trans.com/proyecto/sede/?locale=es_ES)
- Weingartner, H. (director). (2007). *A game of intelligence*. Germany-Austria: Coop 99, Kahuuna Films, Österreichischer Rundfunk (ORF).
- White, A. (2017). Ethical journalism returns to the front page. [www.redalyc.org/pdf/168/16801621.pdf](http://www.redalyc.org/pdf/168/16801621.pdf)
- Yanes Mesa, R. (2007). Political communication and the new personalized media. *Scopes*, no. 16, 2007, pp. 355-366. <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/168/16801620.pdf>
- Zunzunegui Díez, S. (2007). About Film Analysis: The State of Things. *Communicate*, XV(29), 51-58. <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/158/15802910.pdf>