

Analyze Fake News Based on the Missing of Kate Middleton

Jingqi Chen^{1,a,*}

¹*Penn State University Abington campus, Willow Grove, 19090, United States*

a. jbc6602@psu.edu

**corresponding author*

Abstract: Based on the rapid development of the internet and the widespread use of social media, fake news has gradually become an inseparable part of our daily life. People nowadays are constantly exposed to all kinds of fake news online and easily become either the witnesses or even the disseminators of rumors. This situation contributes significantly to expanding their influence and brings about unexpected and often negative results. Therefore, scholars and professionals have begun to pay close attention to this phenomenon and draw some valuable conclusions. This research thoroughly explains fake news and conducts a detailed analysis of disinformation, which is purposefully fabricated fake news, using the event of the missing of Kate Middleton as an example. The analysis encompasses the emergence, spread and far-reaching impact of disinformation, thereby emphasizing the crucial significance of accurately recognizing fake news.

Keywords: Fake news, disinformation, the missing of Kate Middleton, spread of fake news, impact of fake news.

1. Introduction

There are many ways to obtain information, including words, audio, images, and the internet, with the latter becoming increasingly prevalent in people's daily lives. With the development of internet, nowadays people have easier access to a variety of medias like Facebooks, Instagram, Twitter. However, as more and more people begin to share information online, people raise questions about the news that posted by the public, mainly focusing on the authenticity of news. This false information always has a professional term--fake news. But what is fake news exactly? And how fake news spread and what is the impact? This essay will first state the definition of fake news, then discuss its development, and finally analyze one kind of fake news—disinformation—using the case of the missing Kate Middleton as an example. So the research is expected to help people have better understanding of fake news, thus promoting the awareness of distinguishing fake news and preventing its spread and resulting negative impacts.

2. The definition of fake news

Fake news has a similar meaning on the universal scale. [1] The Cambridge Dictionary defines fake news as “false stories that appear to be news, spread on the internet or using other media, usually created to influence political views or as a joke.” Because of its only limit on authenticity and form of the information, this broad definition is likely to contain a lot of contents. [2] Authors Xichen Zhang and Ali A. Ghorbani listed rumors, satire news, fake reviews, misinformation, fake

advertisements, conspiracy theories, false statement by politicians when mentioning the variety of fake news. However, instead of discussing every kind of fake news, this essay is going to focus on the disinformation and misinformation, which are divided by fake news according to their difference in the intention. [3] Misinformation is often spread in the lack of any intent to mislead. (Stephan Lewandowsky, Ullrich K. H. Ecker, Collen M. Seifert, Norbert Schwarz and John Cook) [4] Misinformation is unintendedly inaccurate, false, or misleading. (Sille Obelitz Søre) While [5] “Disinformation is nonaccidentally misleading information”, which distinguishes it from honest mistakes or overly subtle satire, said by Don Fallis in the article what is disinformation[6].

It is a consensus that 2016 US presidential election contributes to the increasing popularity of fake news and disinformation. After that, false stories on the internet have a uniform name and people begin to pay attention to this kind of information. When taking about the reasons behind the rapid growth of fake news, [7] an article (Yariv Tsfati, H. G. Boomgaarden, J. Strömbäck, R. Vliegenthart, A. Damstra & E. Lindgren) states the role that mainstream media play in the dissemination. [8] A USC study (Pamela Madrid) also relate it with social media, and it researches on the users’ behaviors such as their lack of critical thinking skill and their strong political beliefs. In fact, fake news is not totally a new thing. [9] “False information has reached a crescendo, but it’s hardly a new phenomenon. Fake American journalism is older than the country itself”, argued by journalism Barry Yeoman as the subheading of the article “That’s Fake News”. This article traced to the earliest newspaper in the American colonies that published a false report about the death of King Louis XIV of France and explained subsequent influenced public perception. This early piece of false news have already revealed the appalling and shocking characteristics of fake news, which is proved to be a vital factor of the existence of it. Therefore in the following time, fake news never stops. New communication way like social medias allow it to be created and spread in a new way. More and more people engage in sharing and spreading informations in Twitter, Facebook or Instagram. For the future of fake news, [10] Christoph Dornan believes that “It is not possible to purge falsehood from the information ecosystem”, which means that fake news is likely to constantly appear online.

3. Case study—The Missing of Kate Middleton

It is clear that fake news has surged recently and will continue being a problem in the future. But how a specific piece of false information spread? The Missing of Kate Middleton can be a great example for studying the spreading process of fake news and disinformation. The event of Kate Middleton can be divided into 4 periods in total, which are “Last Official Public Appearance”, “Sixty Days of Silence & Suspicions”, “Suspected Appearance” and “Mystery Behind Royal Family Photo”.

The story began on Dec 25, 2023, when Kate Middleton attended royal Christmas with Prince William and their children at Sandringham. On that day, [11] TOWN&COUNTRY magazine used “lovely” to describe Kate. However, a surprising statement issued by Kensington Palace on Jan 17, 2024, reported that Kate was admitted to the London Clinic for [12] “planned abdominal surgery” and had “successful” surgery. Rumours and conspiracy theories spread immediately, especially on social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram. The major discussion focused on the question, “Where is Kate Middleton?” Some people post online saying that Catherine faced serious complications after surgery, requiring drastic actions to save her life. And someone believed that Kate and Prince William were getting divorced. A X account also showed his seemingly logical speculation, “Seeing #KingCharles thank for all the cards & good wishes he’s had following his cancer diagnosis it seems very odd that #PrincessofWales #KateMiddleton hasn’t thanked for all the cards & good wishes she’s undoubtedly had. Just total silence. They’re surely hiding something??”. Or all the guesses were total nonsense? The result was that people did not get any official and direct answer at that time, so concerns about the health of Kate still grew. Until March 4, 2024, the event developed into the third part. Kate and her mom Carole Middleton were photographed by paparazzi

in Windsor, England, where Kate and her family live. Instead of alleviating the suspicion, this blurred image contributes to added confusion from the public. Articles or posts on social media were shared with increasing clicks and likes. An important point came on Mother's Day (Mar 11, 2024) when Kate posted her first official photo with children since abdominal surgery. However, hours after it was released by Kensington Palace, four major photo agencies issued "kill notices," expressing concerns it had been edited. Kate admitted this point and she wrote on X: "Like many amateur photographers, I do occasionally experiment with editing. I wanted to express my apologies for any confusion the family photograph we shared yesterday caused." This performance helped confirm what people had suspected. Again, "where is Kate Middleton?" This time, "Katespiracy", a term the internet has dubbed speculation about Kate Middleton's whereabouts, has taken another bizarre turn. There was a wide variety of speculations and arguments on the internet. And this time the main focus was on the theory that the missing Kate is somehow connected to William, saying that William had an affair with Sarah Rose Hanbury, the Marchioness of Cholmondeley, who is a friend of the Wales' with ancestral ties to the royal family. Other rumors suggested that Kate had been abused by William or even murdered. Some accounts even wrote that Princess is growing out bangs or recovering from a Brazilian butt lift. All the rumors seriously influenced the life of the two main characters Kate and William. Finally, Princess Kate made appearance in video in front of the public and explained that she is having cancer treatment, putting rumors to rest.

By that time, people realized that rumors about Kate Middleton's disappearance had persisted for nearly half a year, prompting efforts to uncover the reasons behind this phenomenon and its impact on the online environment. Some people said it is due to the policy of the royal family, which is "never complain, never explain". Others think that people have created their own theories in an information vacuum. Consequently, the fake news about Kate Middleton was identified as disinformation. [13] BBC news explained that this news was created by Russia deliberately for its military and political purpose. "Their messaging around Kate appears wrapped up in their ongoing campaigns to attack France's reputation, promote the integrity of the Russian elections, and denigrate Ukraine as part of the wider war effort," said Professor Innes. Inners explained that the spread of these rumors was achieved by using a master account, which was then supported by a network of other accounts responding to it.

4. Discussion

By looking at the whole event, it is evident that both Kate and William were troubled by the online rumors, which seemed to force them to clarify the truth. The Prince of Wales, 41, was [14] "upset and angry" over the gossip surrounding the Princess of Wales. Not only disinformation, but any kind of fake news can have a big impact over people or even society. For instance, in the age of COVID-19, there was a viral spread of fake news online. [15] Article "Tracking COVID-19 using online search" presents that the spread of false information on social media has accelerated the urgency of finding treatment for the Covid-19 and led to the panic among the public. Besides the fake news in disease, others can also bring impact. [16] Since of the intentions of fake news like gaining political or economical advantages, drawing attention (Alexander P. Sukhodolov and Anna M. Bychkova), fake news can decide what people are watching or listening, thus affecting their behaviors and minds. For example, [17] article Exploring the Threat of Fake News: Facts, Opinions, and Judgement argues that "fake news is a threat to our democratic order."

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, research indicates that fake news fundamentally lacks authenticity. It can be divided into disinformation and misinformation, which are false because of intentional purposes and lack of

information respectively. This study analyzed the case of Kate Middleton's missing to understand how fake news spreads and its impact. From December 2023 to March 2024, rumors swirled online about Kate Middleton's alleged disappearance, fueled by misleading social media posts and fake news websites. Fabricated stories suggested Kate had been kidnapped or was in hiding due to a scandal, which quickly gained traction all over the world and influenced the normal life of Kate. Though these fake news were finally proved to be wrong by Kate, researchers found that they were disinformation that created by Russia for military purpose. The incident highlighted the dangers of disinformation and the rapid spread of fake news, illustrating the huge impact of fake news. Other fake news can also bring negative influence to individuals, even the whole society. To help people distinguish fake news from real news, some recommendations are provided. In fact, this paper lacks a detailed analysis of misinformation and the process by which fake news spreads. It is hopeful that future research will emphasize a case study of misinformation and research how misinformation spreads.

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